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THE ANOINTED

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THE ANOINTED

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To Martha

THE ANOINTED

ONE

Once I was sitting on a bench in Boston Common and a crazy man came down the path from that Civil War memorial. He was an old man about fifty or sixty and the lapels of his coat were covered with celluloid buttons that said, "O, You Kid," "Keep Cool With Coolidge," "Cow Brand Soda," "The Jolly Chums Club," and things like that.

This crazy man came over to my bench in the shade and sat down. Pretty soon he looked over at me and began to laugh. He laughed and laughed.

I said to him, "Mister, what in hell are you laughing at?"

And he stopped laughing a little and wiped his eyes on a blue bandanna handkerchief, and said, "I am laughing at you and Boston and the world. God and I are laughing."

So I rolled a cigarette and lit it while he went back to his laughing. And then I said to him:

"Maybe you wouldn't mind telling me what you and God see so funny in me and Boston and the world?"

He tried to stop laughing then and leaned over and tapped my knee with one finger. He gulped and gurgled and his chest heaved and finally he got quieted down enough so he could say:

"My young friend, your mind is finite. You couldn't understand the infinite. God and I walk together and we have a great joke between us."

"For Christ's *sake,*" I said in the amazed way you have to treat drunks and idiots.

"Few men have been privileged to talk to

God," he went on. "There was Moses and Noah and—"

"And you," I interrupted. "Well, what did God tell you about?"

The crazy man threw back his head and glared at me.

"He told me the secret of the universe," he shouted. "He showed me that the whole shebang's an illusion, a dream. Look at the sun!" He waved one arm at the sky. "There is no sun. There is no world. There is no Boston. There is no you."

Then he began to yell louder and to laugh so hard that some children and a woman coming down the path turned and went the other way. And pretty soon a policeman came hustling up and led the crazy man off.

Now, I don't think that crazy man ever talked with God at all. I think he was only crazy and his poor head was crawling with crazy ideas.

But of course there is a possibility. Mind you, I don't really believe it, but still there's a possibility that this fellow had been brave enough to sail across the Black Ocean where no living man ever goes and that he had seen the truth and that the truth was too much for him.

There's a possibility that when I sail out across

the Black Ocean even I won't be able to get back without my mind being addled. But I don't believe that either. I don't believe it, but I'm not going to take chances. That is why I'm writing this now. I will write down all about myself and how I got to be what I am. Then, if I don't get back all right, people will know why.

No matter what happens, though, I know this crazy man was wrong about everything being a dream. And I'll tell you why I know this. Dreams never have any system. I can't remember ever having had a dream that paid any attention to system or sense. But there's more system to the world than you'd think, unless you have a lot of education or unless you are like me and notice everything.

When I was just a little boy I used to go down to the old mill which was about half a mile from the farm. And sometimes I would lay down in the tall grass by the edge of the dam and chew on the sweet stems of timothy and look at the water sliding slick and silvery as Grandma's polished pewter pitcher over the dam. I used to watch the bubbles and froth and leaves and sticks circle round and round below the dam until I'd get kind of dizzy. And one day it came to me all of a sudden that

these little whirlpools always went the same way. They always went round and round from left to right like the hands of a clock.

One day Grandpa was down there with me to see if he could snag a bullhead or two for dinner and I asked him why the bubbles and rubbish always circled from left to right. Grandpa looked at them and I could see that he'd never noticed that before although he'd been living less than a half mile from the dam all his life.

And he said, "Well, Harry, I reckon the water kind of got swirling that way when they first opened the dam, and of course it can't stop and turn the other way now. If it'd got swirling the other way at first it'd still be doing it now."

But Grandpa was wrong. The next time you take a bath you watch the water when you pull the plug out of the tub. There'll likely be enough soapsuds and scum so you can notice plain, and you'll see that it whirls around from left to right when it goes down the drain.

I took Grandpa's word for it, though, until one real still evening that fall when we were burning some brush. Then I saw that the smoke went up into the sky in swirls and that the swirls went from

left to right the same as the bubbles below the dam. And I got to noticing smoke on every still day and saw that it went round and round the same direction as a clock's hands every time, proving that it wasn't just happenstance the first time I saw it. And one day when I was out in the woods I saw a vine growing up an old dead tree and the vine went round and round the tree from left to right. And every other vine I could find went the same way. And so did the little curlicues on Grandpa's grapevine and those on Grandma's sweet peas—always from left to right like a clock's hands.

Now, if I'd always stayed home I would always have figured that everything in the world goes from left to right. But once, when I was seventeen or eighteen years old, I was down south of Antofagasta on the Chile beach with a negro named Jack Johnson, but not the prize fighter at all, and a slim little Finn named Ura Ahoompa, although that probably isn't the way to spell his name.

Pretty generally it is a rocky beach along the Chile coast but we were on a strip of white sand with rocks running out to sea on both sides of us, and the rocks had been carved by the sea into all

sorts of funny shapes. And back of us the Andes were rearing up purple and big and white-headed with snow.

Well, we had a chunk of what the Chile Indians call "pan," which is spig for bread, and we had a fish and Jack Johnson was fixing to cook the fish for our supper. The wind had been blowing all day, but now in the evening it had died down and was still as still, and I was prowling up the beach after more driftwood for the fire.

When I was coming back with an armload of wood I saw Jack Johnson had a fire going and the smoke was raising straight up into the sky—a heavy, yellowish smoke because the wood was kind of damp. I had been kicking along in the sand in my bare feet the way a man will sometimes when he's not in a hurry, picking up pebbles in my toes and seeing how far I could throw them.

But I quit that when I saw the smoke, because the smoke looked funny. For a minute I couldn't figure out what was wrong. Then it came to me.

That smoke was spiraling up and it was turning from right to left, opposite from the way clock hands travel.

Well, I was sort of excited and I pointed out

the way the smoke was going to Jack Johnson and Ura Ahoompa.

"Damp old wood like this," says Jack Johnson, "and I can't do nothing about it."

So I told him about it going round and round in the other direction back home and he says, "Well, sure enough, what you going to expect in a country where they have summer in the wintertime and winter in the summertime?"

Jack Johnson was a pretty dumb nigger, but he gave me an idea. And the next morning on the way up to Antofagasta I saw a vineyard and I went over and looked at the curlicues, and the curlicues curled from right to left, just the opposite from the way they did at home.

Then I began to wonder whether all the folks living in Chile were left-handed or not, and the first man I saw doing anything at all was a fellow in a village outside the city who was beating a balky jackass and he was beating it with a stick in his left hand. Now some folks wouldn't have looked any further than that. They'd just say, "Everybody that lives south of the equator is left-handed, and I know because I was down there and paid special attention." But it just goes to

show that you can't be too careful about those things. It just happened that this particular man who was beating the jackass was left-handed, and as near as I could judge there weren't any more left-handed people in Chile than in the United States. Of course I don't know about the Indians, but most of the other folks there came from places north of the equator originally, and their folks naturally would have taught them to be right-handed.

The first thing I did in Antofagasta was to hunt up a place where I could take a bath, and I had considerable trouble, too, because there weren't any too many such places and because I didn't know then that "el baño" was the word. It wasn't that I needed a bath so much, because I had been doing a lot of swimming in the sea and places, but I wanted to see how the water would go down the drain.

Well, I finally found a place back of a barbero shop—a great big zinc tub where a whole family could take its Saturday night at once and save money—and an old woman filled it up with water out of wooden buckets and told me to go to it. I took a bath honest enough, because I had to pay

half a peso for it and then I pulled the plug and sat real quiet so as not to disturb the soapy water.

Sure enough, the scummy white suds began to circle from right to left around the drain. I paddled the water with my hand and made it go the other way. But pretty soon it reversed itself and was gurgling down the drain from right to left. And that settled it.

What really matters about this is that, in the United States or Europe, when you're facing the sun it is moving from your left to your right. And in Chile, when you're facing the sun it's moving from right to left.

This is important, you see, because it shows you how much system there is to the world and everything, but I will go into that later.

Right now I want to give you an idea how I learned so many things although I quit going to school when I was thirteen and ran away from home and went steamshipping when I was only fourteen, although quite tall and strong for my age.

You may say, "That fellow isn't very modest," when you read this, but I say, "To hell with that." I'm going to tell the truth in this book about

myself and all the things I have found out. And if I tried to be modest and lied and said I was ignorant, why would anyone want to read what I've got to say?

TWO

I was about six feet tall when I was fourteen years old and I was only in the sixth grade because I couldn't keep my mind on what old Miss Kendrick was trying to teach. It wasn't that I was stupid. It was just that old Miss Kendrick thought I was stupid. And because I was about twice as big as any other kid in the sixth grade, it wasn't much fun.

Then Grandpa had a big old atlas book with maps and pictures of every place in the world. I used to look through that old atlas book by the hour and figure on going to every spot in it. Well, I guess I haven't missed many of them and maybe have been places they didn't know about when they made the book. I wish I had that atlas now so I could see.

I had raised a heifer calf and sold it the fall before and I had the money in the bank. And winter began to break up and you could hear the wild geese in the night and the wind smelled damp and sweet. And Grandpa kept nagging at me, saying I would go the same way Pop did if I didn't mend my ways, because Pop was kind of shiftless and got drunk and drove his horse and buggy in front of a train and was killed.

So I got to thinking things over. Grandpa had Herb Sunday for a hired man and never would let him go because Herb had been with him for more than thirty years. And he certainly didn't need anybody else on his little farm. Mom had married a railway mail clerk and was living in St. Louis and the railway mail clerk didn't like me, and besides they had a kid of their own now.

Well, I was big as a man and able to do a

man's work, so I listened to the wild geese and the train whistles at night and decided I might as well get out and begin seeing the world.

I drew my money out of the bank and packed up an old leather grip that had been Pop's and wrote a note to Grandpa and Grandma one night and made tracks. I never saw them again because it was seven or eight years before I ever got back and they were both dead then. I did see Herb Sunday, though, and Herb told me that both Grandpa and Grandma had felt right bad about me going away and that their will ordered the farm and stock sold and a thousand dollars of it go to Herb, which he got, and the rest of it to me to be held in trust for me by Mom. It's kind of getting ahead of things, but I might as well say now that I went to St. Louis to see about my money and found that Mom and the mail clerk had got the court to say I was legally dead, so she got the money and spent it on stock in oil wells that didn't have any oil in them and on an automobile that was worn out when I got there. The mail clerk said a fellow ought to do a little something for his mother, and I reckon he was right.

Anyhow, the night I ran away I bought a

ticket to New Orleans, the closest city where sea-going ships came, and I took the midnight train.

There isn't any use of me trying to tell you how I felt when I got to New Orleans and took a cheap room down by the river, because if you've never been a young kid alone in a big town the first time you probably wouldn't understand. But the whole world seemed exciting and wonderful. There was the clanging of streetcar bells and blatting automobile horns everywhere and crowds on the streets and lights at night and the stink of tar and sewer gas and stale beer down by the water front, and me eating at lunch counters and getting high-tasting things we didn't have at home like wieners and spaghetti and chili con carne and ice cream.

I didn't have a doubt in the world that fine as things were they would get finer day by day. And I just took it for granted that I wouldn't have much trouble getting a job on a steamship and go to Europe or Africa or India or some other grand and interesting place.

But before I started to take a ship I thought I'd better see a little of New Orleans. I was walking around gawking at things like a regular farm boy when I wandered into a narrow, crooked sort

of street. The houses were set right against the sidewalk, the way they are lots of places in New Orleans and almost every place in Europe too, and a woman pulled the lace curtain back from the window and said, "Hello, chicken."

So I stopped and tipped my hat and said hello, not having the slightest idea of what it was all about, having never seen anything of the kind nor heard of it either, if you can imagine that.

She had a gold tooth in front and was red-headed and she had a yellow and red kimono sort of wrapped around her.

When I stopped, she grinned. "Want to come in and spend a dollar?" she asks.

"For what?" I said, and the second I said it I knew what the woman meant and began to blush until my eyes watered.

By my saying that the woman thought I was trying to make out that she wasn't worth spending any money on—which she probably wasn't. "Why, you lousy—" she begins, and then she saw me blushing red as fire and laughed.

"Go on home to your mother," she says. "You're just a baby and I thought you was a man because you had long legs."

So I hustled down the street feeling mad and

ashamed. I tell you this just to show how young and sort of innocent I was. And you may get the idea that I was a pretty brave boy to start out that way to see the world with only about seventeen dollars left in my pocket. But I wasn't brave then —I was just curious and ignorant. And if I had known the things that were going to happen to me in the next few weeks, I would have gone right back to Grandpa's farm and stayed there.

I didn't really get brave for maybe ten years after that, after I had an experience with a navy captain in Hong Kong and after I had done a lot of thinking.

As a matter of fact, I was kind of afraid of that woman then, and when other women down the street grinned at me from their windows and sang out, "Hello, chicken," I just kept looking straight ahead and pounding down the sidewalk as fast as I could go.

So afterwhile I got down on the river, where I'd been a couple of times before and pretty soon I found a ship named the *Claudia.*

She was a rotten old banana tub about to shove off light for Honduras. If I hadn't been so green I would have known she was rotten by the

looks of her and would have kept away unless I was broke and needed to get somewhere else.

But I hadn't ever seen any steamships before I got to New Orleans and I thought I was pretty lucky when I was signed up. You see, I didn't know a thing or I would have been suspicious when it was so easy for a lubber to sign. Limo explained that to me, but I will tell you about Limo later.

I found the first officer on deck although I didn't know he was first officer, but only knew he was some kind of boss. He had fat jowls and a big mustache that drooped down on his jowls and wore a seaman's cap with a visor and he was a Swede by the name of Peterson.

When he asked was I a seaman and what was my name he thought I said Peterson instead of Patterson and he twisted his big mustache and said he didn't think I'd ever learn steamshipping with a name like that. Then he showed his big yellow teeth, grinning, and told me his name was *Mister* Peterson.

I told him I was used to hard work and wanted to learn to be a sailor, so he finally took me to the skipper, who was a skinny old man by

the name of Schiller, and they signed me up to get $10 when we got back to New Orleans.

I went back to my room and got Pa's old suitcase and my duffel and they gave me an upper bunk in the forecastle, which is the place under the bow where the seamen sleep and which they pronounce like it was spelled "fok-sul."

In the bunk under me was a little Englishman named Cutler who didn't go by any other name but Limo because he was an Englishman. Seamen call all Englishmen either Limey or Limejuice or sometimes Limo.

I got very well acquainted with Limo, as you shall see, and he called me Nipper, which is Limejuice for kid or punk. I have had lots of names over the world like Curly or Blondy or Highpockets or Spar or Slim, and later almost everywhere they called me Horseshoes or Horseshoe Harry and that name dated way back to Limo too, although he never heard it. Limo, though, was the only person who ever called me Nipper.

This Limo wasn't very tall, but he was quite active and strong and full of hell when ashore. One of his front teeth was gone and there was something like a little brad nail came down from the upper gum where the tooth ought to be. He'd

had what they call a pivot tooth put in where his own tooth had been broken off with a bottle and then the pivot tooth had come off its anchor and he carried it around in his pocket. Limo was always trying to make the tooth stay on the little brad nail, fastening it on with sealing wax and red lead from the engine room, but it was no go. He nearly swallowed the tooth several times.

Well, we steamed down the river in the evening with the breeze blowing cool up from the Gulf and the lights beginning to twinkle along the levee and reflect in the purple water that was streaked with oil from ship bilge and the city.

I was on the first watch with not much to do because I didn't know anything yet and thinking how wonderful everything was and how lucky I was to be a sailor and on my way to storybook adventures on the high seas and to see foreign countries and all.

When my watch was relieved and we went to mess I was very hungry, as I was most of the time then, and we had boiled beans with pork and potatoes boiled with their jackets on and bread and coffee and it seemed all right to me because I had read a lot of stories of the old windjammers where they would be at sea for months at a time.

I didn't have any kick about anything. I just took it for granted that this was what steamshipping was like and I was too excited about the main idea to notice small things.

But when I got down in the forecastle, there was Limo sitting on his bunk with his shirt off and his arms covered with tattooed lizards and hearts and naked women, swearing to himself.

"You picked a bloody honey for your first one, Nipper," says Limo, looking up at me very gloomy.

I didn't know what he was talking about so I just grinned. There was only dim, reddish lights in the forecastle so I couldn't see Limo very well there in the shadow of my upper bunk. You could feel the pound of the engines with the soles of your feet and the *Claudia* was beginning to roll a little, riding high and light as she was. And there was the funny, musty smell that most forecastles have from bad tobacco and sweaty clothes and things.

Then Limo reached down careful and picked up one of his shoes and threw it across the forecastle.

"Hell," he said. "Bloody bastard got away."

"What?" I asked, wondering if Limo was crazy, and feeling a little uneasy.

"Cockroach," he said. "Big as a pigeon egg, he was."

Then he went on to cuss out the *Claudia* and our bean dinner.

"First meal and it's boiled beans," said Limo. "What'll it be later, I wouldn't want to imagine. I cawn't stand the thought of it."

Limo pronounced can't like a stage actor would. He pronounced lots of words in a funny way and was a little hard to understand until you got used to him. There's no use of me trying to write things the way he said them because I couldn't. But if you've ever heard an Englishman talk, particularly a sailor Englishman, you'll know what I mean. There was something about Limo, though, that you couldn't help liking. Of course he was always bellyaching about something, but he did it in an interesting sort of way.

The next day I had my first turn at the wheel, and I wish I had a dollar for every hour since.

Mr. Peterson showed me how to hold her on the course and left me feeling very proud indeed steering that tub south by west across the Gulf.

It took me a little time to get on to the knack,

the same as with any lubber, and I'd find her edging over a point or two to port; when I'd correct that she'd edge over a point or two to starboard, so I was having my hands pretty full when Mr. Peterson came back.

He stood there with his big bony hands in his jacket pockets for a minute and then he piped up. "Peterson—" he kept calling me Peterson—"I don't so much mind you writing your name with the wake, but it's carrying things much too far when you go back to cross the t."

I thought that was a pretty good wisecrack for a man like Mr. Peterson, but I found out later that they always for a hundred years or more have pulled that one on a lubber if he has a "t" in his name, and if not they say go back and dot the "i" if he has an "i" in his name, and if not even that, well, they use a dirty word or something for the gag.

I was finding the cruise a lot of fun, it being nice smooth weather, although I was used to better food myself than the beans and canned beef and corn-meal mush they were feeding us. But on the evening of the second day Limo motioned for me to sit down on his bunk with him.

"Nipper," said Limo, "I got it that we're heading in for Vera Cruz. Probably the old man figures he can buy fuel cheaper there and maybe pick up a little cargo to boot. I can't put up with this bloody tub any longer, not half, and I'm bloody well going to jump ship when we put in."

"You mean," I asked Limo, "that you're going to desert?"

"Don't look so shocked," said Limo. "It ain't like we was in the navy. It would teach the blighters a lesson if the whole crew was to jump, and they can't do a thing much to you, except deport you if they catches you, either.

"What say you come with me, Nipper? I've taken a liking to you, I have for a fact, and I'll show you a good time in Vera Cruz. I've made that port many a time and I know a sweet little chicken there what may have a sister or friend you'd like. 'Tis a great port for a fact, when you know your way around, and I know the ropes. What say, Nipper?"

"Well, I don't know," I said. "I'd kind of like to see bananas growing and—"

"You'll see all that in good time. And after we've done the sights of Vera Cruz, why, blimy, we'll ship on a good, clean British ship and go

back home and we'll see the sights of London. There's a city for you, lad. London, and Liverpool too. Cities that'll put hair on your young chest."

So I got to thinking that after all I was out to see the sights of the world, and what could I see unless I got off the ship and stayed awhile?

"All right," I said to Limo finally, "I'll go with you if you're sure we can get jobs on another boat." And he said he was sure.

The next morning we steamed through the breakwall into Vera Cruz harbor and the bluest water imaginable, with the city sprawling off low and white and red in the distance and with the old, old fort lying on its island to starboard like maybe a pearl on purple velvet. Later this San Juan de Ulloa didn't seem so pretty, but that came afterwards.

And Limo said to me, "Of course we can't smuggle our duffel out, so stick your razor and whatever you need into your pockets, and when we get ashore we just won't come back."

Now I hadn't thought about that, and I hated like sin to leave Pop's old leather suitcase because that was about all I ever inherited from him, and

I didn't have nerve enough to tell Limo that I had no razor because I didn't need one yet. But I put on my good suit and stuffed the pockets with what trinkets I couldn't bear to leave, and Limo and I was let ashore that afternoon for a couple of hours.

I was quite goggle-eyed over Vera Cruz. It was all an old story to Limo who had been there many times, but he was having a great time showing me things. We tramped around the crooked streets past flat-topped 'dobe houses, most of them with faded blue or pink signs reading "Cantina" or something on them, and because cantina means barroom in Spanish, Limo had to stop in a lot of them for a shot of pulque or tequila. And we went up by the very old church with the buzzards roosting on its towers and watched the buzzards fighting in the streets over filth the way sparrows do here at home. And finally we went down another street toward the far end of the water front where Limo's girl Alicia lived in a cantina with her quite old mother.

Alicia was small and pretty dark and looked a little negroish, but she had nice eyes and was remarkably glad to see Limo. Of course I didn't

know any Spanish and Alicia only knew about a dozen words of English, so I didn't have a very complete idea of what they were talking about in the back room of the cantina. Only now and then when Alicia was sitting on Limo's lap they would look over at me and laugh and then Alicia would hug and kiss Limo. And then Limo would say, "Nipper, you long-legged bastard, she says you're better looking than me. She says she thinks she'll throw me over for you, but I'm not afeared. Blimy, it takes more than looks for the ladies."

Well, Alicia and her old mother fixed up a kind of bedroom for me on the floor of a dirty lean-to shed next to the kitchen which they used as a storeroom and for garbage, although they moved the garbage outdoors. It didn't smell very good and there were rats big as a half-grown cat. I couldn't help thinking how loud Limo would have yelled if the forecastle of the *Claudia* had been as bad as my bedroom.

Limo slept with Alicia in the same room with her old mother, who didn't appear to have much to say about anything. And that bedroom was almost as cluttered up and dark and dirty as my shed, with old clothes thrown around in the cor-

ners and neither bed actually made up. But Limo, who was particular about taking baths and keeping clean himself, seemed to be having a great time.

We stayed close in the cantina for two days until we were sure the *Claudia* had gone on to Honduras. And then, because Alicia had told him about what had been going on in Vera Cruz, Limo dug into his pocket and pinned a little English flag on his coat lapel before we started exploring.

"Wish't I had another one for you to wear, Nipper," Limo said. "They're not much in love with the Yankees down here right now, not half. But you stick close to me and I can tell 'em we're both British."

Well, I told Limo that while I wasn't really a Yankee because Grandpa had fought the Yankees in the Civil War, I certainly wasn't going to be ashamed of being an American no matter where I was. Afterwhile, though, we got up in front of a newspaper office where they were showing bulletins and the crowd would yell things about gringos, which I knew was their word for Americans. I couldn't understand just what they were saying, but it was quite plain that it

was pretty unfriendly to Americans, to say the least.

Then a slim-necked young fellow came running up carrying an American flag about a foot long. He yelled out something, and when the crowd turned he held the flag in front of his face and spit on it. Then he held it so four or five others could spit on it and then he threw it down on the cobblestones and jumped up and down on it. And other young fellows elbowed up to take turns jumping up and down on the American flag. That all made me feel pretty bad. And Limo looked up at me with his lean face all wrinkled in a grin, and with that brad nail sticking down where his tooth ought to be, and he says, "You see what they think of your bloody striped flag down here, Nipper. Your president has ordered the President of Mexico to salute the American flag and, blimy, these jolly fellows are showing how they'd salute it."

For a moment I had a notion of running in and rescuing the flag the way you read of heroes doing in the school history books. But just then three very tough-looking fellows shoved up to me and asked a question that had the word gringo in it. You see I wasn't fifteen years old yet and didn't

have much judgment, so I might have swung on the nearest one of these fellows if Limo hadn't stepped right in.

He began to jabber Spanish faster than a Mexican and held out his coat lapel so they could see the British flag. Then he grabbed me by the arm and grinned. And the tough-looking Mexicans grinned too and tipped their hats to us and moved off.

"That," said Limo, "is the power of the king's navy. The King of England don't make no threats he ain't ready to carry out."

The next afternoon Limo was fooling around the cantina, pretending to help Alicia but drinking quite a lot of tequila, and I was loafing and drinking a few beers which I didn't like very well yet, but much better than tequila or pulque at that. And pretty soon a couple of Mexican navy officers came in and Alicia served them drinks. They seemed to want a good deal of attention from Alicia, so afterwhile Limo came over where I was loafing and says, "Nipper, the Mexican gunboat *Bravo* is in. These bullies is just off it. What say we go down and look over the navy?"

So I said all right and we walked down toward

the docks with Limo feeling pretty high from the liquor he had taken aboard and me feeling my beer more or less, not being used to anything with alcohol in it.

Well, the funny little gunboat with a tall smokestack was in all right, and not anchored in the harbor, but tied up to the dock. However, we couldn't get within twenty paces of her because they had a sentry there to keep everyone away.

This sentry was no older than me and about five feet tall. He was barefooted and was wearing one of those great big Mexican sombreros and had a musket as long as he was.

As Limo and I walked up this kid swings up his musket and calls out, "Halto!"

"No savvy," says Limo and steps up closer.

"Halto," calls out the kid again, and there's no mistaking at all what he means.

As I said before, Limo was feeling his cargo and was full of hell. He screwed up his face in that funny grin of his and says, "Nipper, you talk real fast to him and get his attention while I squat down behind him. Then you give the blighter a shove"

It seemed like a funny idea to me and my

beer, so I steps up closer to the kid and says real solemn:

"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers."

"No savvy," says the kid.

Then I started out slow and motioned with my finger like a school singing teacher on each word, getting faster and faster as I went along.

By this time the kid was grinning because he thought I was drunk and he was watching me very close, figuring it was some sort of a game. Limo, seeing his chance, squatted down and skittered around just back of the sentry on the edge of the dock.

"Peter Piper picked a peck—" I begins once more, and then steps forward and gives him a hard shove on the chest.

Well, the kid went clear over Limo and off the dock, yelling like a fireboat siren as he went. His musket went off, balooey! And he splashed in the drink but was up immediately, hanging to the gunboat, hollering like a fish peddler.

Before Limo and I could even get it into our heads to run, Mexican soldiers came pouring out of that gunboat like bees out of an upset hive.

They were right on our tails before we got under way tearing up the calle—which is Mexican for street—toward Alicia's cantina.

Limo was in the lead, and although my legs were about twice as long as his I was having a hard time to keep up. The mob of Mexican soldiers were right after us, yelping like a pack of hound dogs after a rabbit, and I was scared to death that they would start shooting any minute. Women popped out on the green-painted balconies on the second floors of buildings that had second floors and men came bouncing out the doors to see what was going on.

I don't know where Limo figured on going, because it was plain they would haul us out of Alicia's if we ran in there, and it was plain that some Vera Cruz cop would shoot us if the soldiers didn't catch us.

But we didn't get as far as Alicia's. About a block away I looked back and saw we were gaining on the soldiers. And just then some Mexicans barged out of a cantina and one of them stuck out his foot and tripped Limo. Limo went down and I was so close that I fell over him and skinned my face on the pavement.

I never could remember just what happened

for the next few minutes, but they gave us an awful drubbing and the next thing I knew the soldiers were hauling us up the street with a big crowd of men and women with shawls over their heads and kids following and all of them hooting "Gringo" and many of them trying to spit on us.

Limo, with his face bloody and his clothes torn, kept yelling back, "No gringo—inglees," and pointing to his little English flag. But no one paid him much attention, especially not the soldiers who kept dragging us along up to the old gray church with the buzzards on the towers.

I was very excited and scared, although if I had known then who I was and realized that I was in the world for a definite purpose, as I shall tell you later, I'd have known nothing very serious could happen to me and that all this was part of my training, you might say.

Well, the soldiers took us into the church and down in the cellar where they had a jail and pushed us into a cell, very damp and dreary, and locked the iron door on us.

Limo sat down on one of the benches and began to wipe the blood from his face. Then he looked up at me and grinned. "That," he says, "was a quaint caper, if I do say it myself."

That was the way with Limo. He would beef a lot about little things, but when the going got really bad he was cheerful about it. You couldn't help liking Limo.

THREE

They searched us before they locked us up, but didn't take anything but my big jackknife and Limo's razor. So Limo dragged out his tobacco and rolled a cigarette.

"What are they going to do with us?" I asked him, pretty nearly ready to cry and really wishing now that I'd never left Grandpa's farm.

"Nothing," says Limo, squinting over his

match. "That is, nothing much. I'll get hold of the British consul and he'll spring us from the brig and then bawl hell out of us for the caper. That's all."

So every time a guard or anybody came near our cell Limo would go to the barred door and yell out that he wanted to send a note to the consul. But they wouldn't even look at him.

The next morning, though, they let Alicia in to see us. She'd heard the commotion and come out of the cantina in time to see the soldiers dragging Limo and me off to jail, and she kissed Limo a dozen times through the bars and brought us a basket of bananas and those little Mexican oranges and tortillas and a bowl of meat and peppers, all of which was very welcome because we hadn't had anything to eat except tortillas and water.

Limo tore a couple of pages out of my notebook which I had been going to write a diary in but hadn't got around to, and he wrote a note to the British consul which Alicia said she would take right over and would bring us the answer or the consul just as soon as they would let her in. She had tried to come and see us the night before, but the soldiers chased her away.

Alicia brought the answer the next morning with another basket of groceries and she knew she was bringing bad news by what the consul had told her. Of course I can't remember word for word what the note said, but it read pretty much like this:

"Dear Mr. Cutler:

"The situation here in Vera Cruz is very ticklish at present as you should know, and what might be considered as a foolish prank maybe at another time, now is nothing short of a crime. Your own thoughtlessness could prove so embarrassing to the British Crown that you have no right even to expect the protection the Crown gives British subjects. You know you have done a serious wrong. Now it is up to you to accept whatever punishment the Mexican government sees fit to give you like an Englishman."

Limo read the note out loud to me and kissed Alicia through the bars again and says to me, "Keep the old dobber up, Nipper. Blimy, they can't do any worse than shoot us. What they'll really do is deport us and we'll be on our way to dear old Liverpool inside of two weeks."

That afternoon the soldiers came and unlocked the door, and poking us up a bit with the

ends of their rifles, they drove us out and up to a room where a general or some other big officer was sitting behind a desk. And there was a skinny, black old man with close-clipped hair, who turned out to be an interpreter.

The general said something to the interpreter, who looked at us hard from over the tops of his glasses. Then he says, "You are Americans." He didn't ask a question. He just said it.

"No, sir," says Limo. "We're Englishmen." He flipped his little flag with his thumb.

"You came here on the American ship, *Claudia,*" says the little man very sadly.

"Yes," says Limo, "but that don't mean anything. There were Swedes and Germans and a Mexican or two on that boat."

"You are in the employ of the United States government?"

"No, your honor," says Limo, shaking his head. "We were working for the Lorimer line, but we jumped ship because it was lousy."

"Yes? Then it was the Lorimer line or some other corporation that hired you to blow up the *Bravo?*"

Limo's jaw dropped. "We never tried to blow up anything, your honor," he says. "Let me tell

you—it was all my fault. The Nipper here didn't have a thing to do with it. I was drunk, you see—understand—zigzag. It was a joke, see, and not anywhere near as funny as I thought it was then. If you've ever been drunk, your honor, you'll know what I mean."

The general said something to the interpreter and the interpreter strutted a little and then said, very sarcastic, "We have heard testimony from three soldiers who saw you throw your bomb in the water when you realized you could not accomplish your purpose. You mean to say, perhaps, that these soldiers of the Mexican Republic were lying?"

"They sure were," I spoke up.

Limo grabbed my arm. "Let me do the talking, Nipper," he said. Then to the general, "If this here is a trial we're having, I demand an attorney."

And when the interpreter had told the general what Limo said, the general grinned in a nasty sort of way and told the interpreter to tell us that this was a court-martial and that all we had to do was to tell the truth.

"All right," said Limo, "we didn't mean any

harm at all. The boy and I were just out for a lark and we're sorry for what we did."

"It is a lark, perhaps," says the interpreter for the general, "to blow up a warship, kill many men and throw two great nations into a war."

"My God, your honor," says Limo, "we didn't kill anybody. We didn't try to kill anybody, we didn't—"

"But you had a bomb," interrupts the interpreter.

"Absolutely, we had no bomb."

"What was it you threw in the water, then?"

"I swear to God," says Limo, holding out his hands, "that we didn't throw a thing in the water."

The interpreter repeated that to the general and the general grinned again.

"You swear to that before God?" asks the interpreter for the general.

"Before God," says Limo.

"Then," says the interpreter, "how about the sentry? Didn't you throw him in the water?"

Limo seemed to cringe his head down like somebody had thrown a brick at him. "Oh," he says. "Well, blimy, I'd forgotten about that sentry. But—well, we never threw him into the

water anyhow. That is we didn't mean for him to go in the water, if you understand what I mean."

The fat general wrinkled his nose as if he smelled something bad and motioned for them to take us away, which the soldiers did. But we weren't locked in our cell for more than half an hour when the soldiers came down again and marched us up through the church to the front door and for a minute I thought they were going to turn us loose. But no such luck. Instead, we were headed down the street toward the water front with a crowd following again and yelling unfriendly things at us. And there was a yellow streetcar stopped on the corner with all the folks inside craning their necks out the windows to look at what was going on.

When we finally got down on the docks there were the barefooted cargadores, which is Mexican for stevedores, all quitting work to stare and talk over what was happening.

Well, I wasn't worried because Limo had said they probably would deport us and I just took it for granted that they were going to load us on a boat and ship us to England.

They loaded us on a boat all right, but they

didn't take us to England. It was a big rowboat with four men at the oars and three of the soldier guards sitting behind us with their guns. Limo asked the one in charge if they were going to put us aboard a British ship. And this soldier grunted at Limo and told him to keep quiet.

By then we were pulling out and heading toward the breakwall and toward the island with the palm trees waving in the sky where the old fort of San Juan de Ulloa squatted.

Limo turned to me, and his face looked tight. He saw what was up, although I didn't yet. "Nipper," he said, "I'm afraid we're in for it proper."

"Silencio," yelled the soldier who was in charge, meaning for Limo to shut up.

And in a few minutes the boat pulled in to a little dock where more soldiers tied her up and Limo and I were marched to a big iron door which was opened by a sentry, and then inside the big old stone building to a room where another general sat at a desk smoking a brown cigarette.

The soldier in charge of us saluted the general and laid a folded paper on the desk. The general took a deep drag on his cigarette and picked up the paper.

Then Limo stepped forward with his hat in his hand and said, "Pardon me, sir—"

The general's black eyes flashed at Limo. He smacked the palm of his hand hard on the desk twice and yelled out an order.

Before Limo could start his speech there came a clippety-clop of hobnail shoes running on the stone floors and half a dozen soldiers tore into the general's room and grabbed us and dragged us away.

The soldiers hauled us into a little room, taking what little money we had left and Limo's smoking tobacco, and none too gentle about it either. And all the time Limo was talking Spanish to them, wanting to know what was the big idea and how long were they going to hold us there and telling them about the British navy. But the soldiers either just grinned or said, "No savvy."

Then they took us down some stone steps through a dark, damp passage that smelled like the bear pits in a zoo. There was door after door along the passage of heavy, rusty iron with thick iron grating too high up to look through, and the sound of our feet on the wet flagstones brought yells and moans and hammerings from the other side of the doors.

Finally we came to a door where the soldier in the lead stopped and fitted a key as big as a ball-peen hammer in the keyhole and turned it with the noise of pulling a nail from a board. Then he and another soldier put their shoulders to the door and pushed it screeching open.

They shoved Limo and me inside the door, and the door squawked and clanged shut and the lock turned. And there we were.

High up on one side of our cell was a little barred window, maybe a little more than a foot square. On the floor at one side was a heap of something that we pulled out to where the light streamed down from the window and found it to be ragged and moldy blankets, which were to be all the bed we had, and there was a great scurrying of small things on the blankets because maybe the touch of sunshine hurt their eyes. The only other thing in the cell was a battered old bucket. Beads of water stood on the walls that were partly plaster and partly rock. And the floor was not only damp, it was wet.

Limo and I stood together in the middle of the little cell looking at the blankets and not saying a thing.

Then I finally asked him did he find out how long a time we were going to serve.

"No," he says, "I didn't. The bastards wouldn't say a word. But I think that's a good sign. I think that means they're only trying to give us an awful scare and let us out in a couple of days.

"Just as soon as a British ship comes in they'll take us out and deport us. But they want to bloody well scare us first."

So we shook out the blankets the best we could and sat down and Limo got to telling about all the fun we would have when we got to Liverpool. And after an hour or so we could hear somebody clumping up the corridor outside and some rattling and yowling of the other prisoners down the line. And presently a panel in our door was unlatched and opened and we could see the wrinkled brown face of an old Mexican.

"Buenos dias, Hosey," says Limo.

"Buenos dias, señores," says Hosey, and dishes out two bowls of Mexican beans and peppers for us with a slab of tortillas and one big tin cup of water.

The old man seemed to be friendly enough, so Limo went on talking to him, trying to find

out how long our sentence was for. But Hosey told him in Mexican that he just worked there and that they never bothered to tell him much about things.

So we ate our supper, which wasn't so bad, and it got dark pretty soon afterwards—the darkest dark you ever saw. It was dark in that cell even in the daytime, but at night it was so black that you might just as well have been stone blind.

FOUR

We didn't do much sleeping that night. I have always liked beds to be moderately hard, but try pounding your ear on stone with nothing but a couple of ragged old blankets, and the stone wet at that, and you'll decide you'd rather have even one of those old German feather beds where you sink in a foot and a half. The side you were laying on would get numb and

you'd turn over and that side would get numb too, and as the night wore on it grew very cold and you couldn't see a thing except the little square of window high up where maybe one star would be showing.

There was absolutely no way to tell what time it was or how far along the night had dragged, because there wasn't a sound except when either Limo or I got up to stamp our feet and get the blood circulating. You couldn't walk much because we hadn't learned the exact size of the cell yet, and you might smash right into the rock wall or kick over the bucket if you tried walking.

Later on, of course, we got things down to a system. We could go straight under the window and know just how many steps we could go in any direction without running into anything.

Finally after a year or so the night about wore itself out and the window began to get lighter and we could hear a bird singing. And then by and by there were voices and the crunch, crunch of feet marching in the gravel outside. And a voice called out an order and the regular crunch, crunch stopped and you could hear a sort of aimless kicking around in the gravel for a while. Then the voice gave another order and that was

followed by an oily, steel clickety-clack, click-clack that you never could mistake if you've ever heard it.

The voice called out once more. And then there was the stuttering bang of half a dozen or more rifles fired at once. And while the shots were still echoing, that oily steel clickety-clack, click of rifle locks again and presently another order and the crunch, crunch of marching feet on the gravel.

Limo and I both were standing up under the window.

"Maybe," said Limo, "some soldier died and they buried him and fired those shots over his grave the way armies do."

But when Hosey came with our tortillas and warm dirty water that they called coffee, Limo asked him what was the shooting about.

Hosey twisted his toothless mouth and says in Spanish that one man of bad politics was no more.

He meant, of course, that they had just killed some political prisoner. And when Limo asked him if he knew why they had us in prison, Hosey twisted his mouth again and said, "Mal politico," meaning that we were political prisoners the same as the fellow they'd just firing-squadded.

So I sat on the floor with my chin on my knees

thinking, and being, as you remember, not fifteen yet was almost ready to break down and cry. And Limo, very nervous because he hadn't had a cigarette for nearly a day, was stomping back and forth.

Finally he paused and turned at me. "Buck up," he snapped. "They ain't shot you yet. And, blimy, even if they was going to shoot you there's no bleedin' reason why you can't take it like a white man."

I didn't say anything, but only looked at Limo standing there with the light from the little window streaming down on his head and shoulders, with his hair matted and with a stubble of whiskers all over his face and his eyes bleary with blue pouches under them and his lips pulled back tight showing his missing front tooth and the brad nail and his coat sleeve torn down at the shoulder from the fight and the little British flag still sticking in his lapel. I saw all these things and thought my eyes were getting so I could see better in the cell.

And Limo says slowly, "I suppose you're blaming me for getting you into this thing."

"Well," I said, "it was your idea, wasn't it?"

"If it hadn't been for me," said Limo, "you'd

have got your head bloody well kicked off the time they were spitting on your striped Yankee flag."

"If it hadn't been for you," I said, "I'd never have deserted ship. And now I'd be on my way back to New Orleans—"

"And," said Limo, very bitter, "you wish you'd never laid eyes on me."

The way he said that made me mad. "Yes," I said, "I wish I'd never seen you."

"All right!" Limo's voice was quivering. He stamped over to the bucket and picked it up and carried it to the middle of the cell at the side and put it down against the wall. "Now," he said, "you take your blankets over to that end and stay there and I'll stay here. I won't bother you then, you can bet, not half, and if you cross on this side of the bucket I'll kick a lung out of you. I'm just as bloody sick of you as you are of me and you can bet your interest in hell on that."

So I picked up my buggy, damp old blankets and carried them over to the other side of the cell and sat down. I started going over the blankets inch by inch, trying to clean them and got to thinking about Grandpa and Grandma. It was nearly April now and Grandma's little chickens

would be hatched out and peeping all over the lot. She would be wanting me to dig some horse-radish and grate it for her and the horse-radish would make me cry.

Just thinking about Grandma and the horse-radish made the tears run down my cheeks and before I knew it I was blubbering to myself, and me six feet tall too.

Pretty soon I looked up and there was Limo standing over me, on my side of the cell.

"Forgive me, will you, pally?" he said. "I said a lot of things I didn't mean because I'm awful upset and I'm sorry for it. Of course it was all my fault—I know it as well as you do, but we're in it together now and we'd better make the best of it together."

So I said it was all right and it was as much my fault as Limo's because I pushed the Mexican sentry myself.

And Limo said, "Nipper, you're a bit of all right and I'm going to teach you something that'll mean a lot to you. Spread that blanket of yours over here in the light."

I took the least ragged of my two blankets and spread it on the floor where the light came down from the little window.

'Now," said Limo, reaching into his pants pocket, "see what I've got here." He held up a pair of dice.

"Yes," I said.

"Did you ever shoot craps?" Limo asked, grinning in a funny way.

"Not much," I told him. "Just a little bit with the kids in school, but we never had any money, so we'd shoot for whatever we had."

"Well," he went on kind of slow and funny, "you shot enough craps so's you rather know the difference between a natural and craps. Was you pretty lucky?"

"Not so much," I said, "though maybe luckier than average. Once I shoot a boy named Homer Claussen a pair of pigeons against a good jackknife and win, but that was my only big winnings."

"That's dandy," says Limo, "but some chaps is lucky and some other chaps is luckier. But there's nothing like science to control luck. If you're a scientific shooter and your nerves are right you can throw anything you want."

"It's dishonest to use loaded dice," I objected.

"Oh my—yes, indeed," said Limo, shaking the dice in his left hand. "I wouldn't think of using

loaded dice, not half. It's dishonest, and besides that I've seen chaps practically killed as was caught with loaded dice. There's no science in loaded dominoes. There's nothing but nasty meanness. These here, Nipper, are absolutely honest dice—and what would you like me to throw?"

"Seven," I said.

Limo moved the dice from his left hand over to his right and shook them together sharply. clickety-click, click, and then very gracefully rolled them across the blanket. They stopped three and four.

"Now five and two," said Limo, picking up the dice with his left hand and putting them into his right. Again he shook them hard and tossed them out and the dice skipped across the blanket to land five and two.

For a little while he kept this up, throwing any number I asked him for and missing only once in about fifteen times. He screwed up his mouth when he threw two sixes instead of a five and a six, and said he was a little out of practice.

"This is pretty easy," he said. "It's just the simple five-roll. When you get to the ten-roll you can't expect to get it every time, and there's real

honest-to-God science in the bank. Where you have to bounce them off a wall you've got to be a wizard. I never did know but one man awfully good at banking off a wall and that was a nigger named Lixom in Shanghai and he couldn't be sure more than five out of six. I paid this nigger a hundred dollars Mex to teach me, but I never got good enough to make much off it. Anyhow, we'll start with the five-roll. Look."

He put the dice in the palm of his hand with the five and two up. Then he turned the two dice over together toward the end of his fingers, once, twice, three times. And as they were turning the fourth time the outside dice was at the end of Limo's forefinger.

"You throw them with your hand close to the blanket," said Limo, "at just the right distance so they turn only halfway over before they hit the blanket and just hard enough so's they'll roll an even five times and no more. Understand?"

"Well,'" I said, "kind of, but—"

"You put 'em in your hand the opposite of the way you want them to land and you hold them so they'll click together very convincing, but tight enough so they won't turn over in your hand. And another thing—when you let them roll down

your hand, you've got to duck your middle finger down when the other dice gets to the end of your forefinger. You got to do that because your middle finger is longer and both dice have got to leave your hand exactly the same instant—see? And you got to practice and practice because it don't do you any good to know how to be scientific unless you learn to do it. Here now, you take 'em and see can you shake 'em up and not disturb 'em scientifically."

So Limo put the dice in my right hand with a six and one up and closed my fingers just right and I shook them clickety-click. But when I opened my hand the six which was in the middle had changed to three.

"Too loose," says Limo and we tried it again, but this time the clicks were not convincing.

So he kept me practicing and correcting me until I at least could rattle the bones in my hand and keep them in position.

And the next day I was practicing the five-roll on the blanket and in the afternoon Alicia came to see us.

They wouldn't let her in the cell and they wouldn't let her bring us anything and would only let her talk through the panel in the door

where Hosey would push us our chow and take out the slops and the only way she got even to come to see us that much was getting pretty friendly with those Mexican navy officers who were drinking in the cantina the day we got in trouble.

Well, Limo and Alicia talked quite a while until the guard came and made her go and she cried more or less and Limo told her to write a letter to the prime minister of England in London and tell him about things and get him to send an English battleship to get us out. Even if Alicia couldn't write English, Limo said the prime minister would get the letter all right and that he'd have folks around that could read the Spanish letter to him. And when she promised that she would write the letter that very night and put enough postage stamps on it to take it to England, Limo cheered up quite a bit.

"You know," he said, "England don't stand for damn nonsense like this. It'll take maybe ten days for the prime minister to get that letter and it'll take maybe ten days more to get a battleship fitted out and over here to Vera Cruz. But you can just count on us getting out of San Juan de Ulloa inside of three weeks now."

I didn't say anything because three weeks didn't seem such a short time in there and I was very tired of that cell already.

And then Limo went on: "Alicia said they lock up political prisoners here and if they don't get around to stand 'em up against the wall and shoot them, they forget all about 'em. She says these officers told her there are old men locked up on the level below us that were put in here when they were youngsters. And I told her to write that to the prime minister. She'll do it too. Alicia's a fine kid, not half. I'd sure like to see her tonight."

The days dragged on, every one like the last, only on a couple more mornings we heard the crunch of feet marching in the gravel outside and the orders and the banging of the rifles rubbing out some other political prisoners.

And hour after hour, while enough light was coming through our little window, I would practice with the dice, finding it very difficult indeed to roll them out just hard enough so they would turn over five times complete after hitting the blanket and not a quarter turn more or a quarter turn less. And I found it difficult also to drop my middle finger just at the instant that the first dice got to the end of my forefinger.

As time went on Limo was looking worse and worse when he stood in the light. What face you could see among his whiskers was corpselike and he moaned a lot in his sleep.

"I had tropic fever bad in Africa," he said, "and I suspect it's back on me. All my bones ache and I feel pretty orful."

At night sometimes Limo would be burning up with fever and would talk strange about people I never heard of and sometimes about Alicia and sometimes about the King of England coming over with the British Grand Fleet and blowing Mexico clear off the map. And he'd call out for water, and though Hosey didn't bring us any more I really think he would if he could because Hosey himself wasn't such a bad Mexican. So I would give Limo most of my water and I would eat most of his chow because it only made him sicker to eat.

Limo generally would be feeling better along the middle of the day and he would sit over by the spot of light and coach me on my practicing. We had lost all track of days, but after a while when I could hit the five-roll practically every time and was practicing on the ten-roll, he said, "Nipper, you're going to be quite a scientist.

Keep to your practice and you'll someday get as good or better than your teacher."

And then he told me how I must be very careful never to tell my secret and how I must never, never get greedy.

"If you get greedy," he said, "you're bloody well lost. Never throw more than four straight passes, and mostly don't throw more than three. Pyramid your bets on two or three passes and then drop back to your first bet and seven out. It's best to throw craps once in a while on small bets and curse and swear about it just to make 'em think your lucky streak is about gone. Work along slow and you can get all the money in any fo'c'sle before the cruise is done. But if you get in a hurry the fo'c'sle will get talking and figure something is wrong and maybe rule you out. Being greedy has probably ruined more good scientists than anything else. And after all, what in hell difference does it make if it takes you a week or so to get the money instead of a day or two? They can't spend their money on the ship and you can afford to take your time."

Nobody ever gave a young fellow better advice than that. I know that Marie would think different, because she doesn't feel friendly toward

any kind of gambling, but after all it isn't gambling so much when you're a scientist shooting craps and Marie hasn't much objection to the over four thousand dollars I've got in the bank now, most of which came from being a scientist. And anyhow that advice of Limo's will hold good in a lot of businesses besides being a dice scientist.

As I was saying, time went on very dreary there in the cell with Limo feeling no better and me losing my appetite myself. And early one morning, just after the little window had begun to get gray, I was laying on my blanket with my hands behind my head. And I was thinking about how strange was the whole setup, and it was about the first time I had ever given any real thought to myself and the world and all the people struggling to get something and about God and about what was the big idea of everything anyhow.

When I look back now I can see that was why I was in San Juan de Ulloa in the first place—just to get me to thinking. All the experiences I have had since then wouldn't have meant a thing if I hadn't learned how to take them apart afterwards and get important learning from them.

So I was laying there thinking about how the farm and Grandpa and Grandma and Herb Sun-

day didn't exist any more because I wasn't there, and how the banana ship *Claudia* didn't exist any more after I left it and how the whole world had narrowed down to this little cell and Limo, and sort of wondering what would become of the world when I died and if when I was dead I maybe could know about more than one place at the same time.

And pretty soon I heard a noise and knew I had been hearing it for some time, but just not noticing it because I was thinking so hard. The noise was something like a man hitting a bass drum quite a little way off. That thumping came again and again about ten seconds apart.

I stepped over to Limo and woke him up.

"What's that noise, Limo?" I asked.

"What noise?" he said, sitting up. "I don't hear any noise."

"It was a funny bumping noise," I said. "Wait a minute and maybe it'll start again."

We sat there listening for about a minute, and the bass drum thumping had stopped. But pretty soon there was another sound we caught from a long way off. It was a quick crackling like a fire built of green wood.

"That's coming from Vera Cruz," said Limo.

"Maybe there's a big fire over there or maybe there's a revolution and that's rifle shooting."

But just then came a loud BOOM! so close that it seemed to catch your breath and then from a long way off a crashing rumble.

Limo jumped to his feet and caught me by the arm.

"Nipper," he yelled, "that's a big gun. The prime minister got Alicia's letter. That's a British battleship out there shelling Vera Cruz. You can hear masonry falling over in the city. That'll teach 'em—that'll teach 'em."

Then Limo, with his hollow eyes shining in the dim light, stood up very straight and began to sing in a quivery voice:

> "God save our gracious King,
> Long live our noble King,
> God save the King!"

—to the tune of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee."

FIVE

The thump-booming of the smaller cannons kept up for quite a while—maybe ten minutes or fifteen—with now and then another of the quite loud booms from the big guns. Then they all stopped and from far off in Vera Cruz we could hear the quick rat-a-tat-tat-tat of machine guns and Limo said the British had landed marines who were capturing the city.

About that time some rifle shooting started up right near. There weren't many rifles, probably not more than a dozen, but they made a very respectable racket outside.

"The bloody fools," says Limo. "Some of this Mexican garrison is popping away at the British ships with muskets. All they can do is draw hell on the fort. See if you can lift me up high enough to look out the window."

I lifted Limo quite easily and got him standing on my shoulders, but even then he wasn't high enough to look out, but could only get hold of the stone window ledge with his hands and wasn't strong enough to pull himself up on account of being so sick.

"Jesus," says Limo, quivering up there on my shoulders. And just then WHAM! a shell struck San Juan de Ulloa somewhere with a terrible jar. There was a roar of stonework giving way and Limo let go all holds and started to fall. I caught him partly, but we both slipped and went to the stone floor.

"Jesus," says Limo again. "They're going to blow this bloody prison right down around our ears."

We both got up and ran to the door and

kicked and hammered on it. We could hear other prisoners down the corridor yelling and kicking too.

WHAM! Another shell struck the fort, and again there was the rumbling of stones falling.

Up past the window you could see a cloud of yellowish dust rising from the crumbled rock and mortar that had fallen.

Limo was pacing back and forth, very nervous. "Fine lot of good it's going to do," he said, "for the navy to come clear over here to rescue me and then kill me with their bloody shellfire. I wonder if Alicia didn't make plain to the prime minister just where I'm at? D'you suppose she didn't? That's the trouble with women—can't depend on 'em for important details. They'll get the general idea just the same as a man, but—"

WHAM! Another shell hit the fort, but farther over.

"Trapped like a rat in a hole in the ground," Limo mourned. "What a way for a sailor to die. Alicia and the prime minister and the British navy all out to help me and then kill us both in the helping."

But the third shell was the last to hit the fort. The Mexican soldiers had been chased out

and the ships kept their attention to their business, which was shooting up the town. They would let out fifteen or twenty shots in maybe five minutes and then rest for ten minutes or so. And in between you could hear the machine guns and rifles going it over in Vera Cruz.

This kept up until you could tell by the light in the window that it was afternoon. Then there was no more cannon fire, although you could still hear them fighting in the city.

All day long that kept up and we had nothing to eat and no water because Hosey didn't show up. It was especially bad not having water. As the afternoon wore along the other prisoners down the line of cells began to yell and kick their doors and shout, "Dahme ahwah," which is Mexican for "I want a drink."

It got dark and still no Hosey or anyone else came around and the prisoners were so hoarse from yelling and not having any water that they couldn't yell any more.

We didn't sleep much, either of us, that night. We didn't want to be asleep if somebody came around with something to eat and drink, and we didn't want to be asleep either if the English

prime minister or some of his men pulled in looking for Limo.

Most of the night there was shooting going on in Vera Cruz. Sometimes it would die down and you'd think it was all over. But pretty soon a couple of cracks would ring out in the still dark and then the rat-a-tat of machine guns would start all over again.

It had been light only an hour or so the next morning when we heard some noises in the prison —feet echoing down the long stone passage and voices and the banging of doors.

Both Limo and I began to yell loud enough then, although, figuring we were white men, we hadn't taken part in the general howling for water and groceries the other afternoon.

"Here I am down here, pally," Limo screeched, and I kicked on the door and yelled too.

The noise down the corridor stopped a second.

Then we heard a loud voice. "What the hell— there's white men in here." Feet came clumping fast down the stone floor.

"Where are you, sport?" somebody called from outside.

We kicked some more on the door and presently they had found our door.

"Can you batter the door in, matey?" called Limo.

"Don't need to—we got keys," said the voice.

And then there was a squeal of the lock turning and the door groaned, swinging on its rusty hinges. And there outside were half a dozen red-faced sailors—not English sailors with those gingham, little-girl collars hanging down their backs, but American sailors with their round white caps on the sides of their heads and wearing canvas leggins the way they do when out for business.

"My God," says the chief petty officer, looking at us. "How long you all been in here?"

"Gawblimy," says Limo, "the Americans in here too?"

The petty officer didn't understand him. "You say there are more Americans in this hole?"

Limo was sticking something in his pocket.

"We don't know," I says. "We've been nowhere but just this cell and haven't seen anybody and we haven't had anything to eat or drink since the shooting started."

"Why, you poor bastards," says the husky petty officer. "Well, we'll fix you up pronto on that.

Got anything to take with you?" He wrinkled his nose. "How long you been in this stinking hole?"

We told them we'd lost all track of the time and that the Mexicans had taken most everything away from us. Then Limo says, "You fellows helping the British blow up this place?"

By this time they were leading us up the corridor toward the companionway, with Limo being helped because he was pretty wobbly on his pins.

"British?" says the petty officer. "What makes you think there's British in Vera Cruz? You're English, aren't you?"

"I was born in England," says Limo, kind of weak and trying to talk like an American. "But I'm a naturalized city-zen of Boston. The kid here is a native-born."

When we got to the stone companionway one of the big sailors picked up Limo like a baby, and, the light being a lot better there, I saw that Limo's British flag was gone from his coat lapel.

"Want some help?" one of the sailors asked me. I told him I didn't, that I hadn't been sick like Limo. But my legs were pretty weak going up the steps at that.

Then we were up and out the front door into the morning sunshine that was so bright it

blinded us and in a clean sweet wind that I breathed and breathed to wash out the stink from my lungs.

They hustled us into a motorboat and went zipping over to the city where sailors and marines were in a warehouse and they let us wash and then set us down to a mess table and filled us up with scrambled eggs and thick bacon and corn-meal mush and prunes and coffee, and never was there any food like it to me, although Limo still being not so well couldn't eat but one helping and two cups of coffee.

While we were eating a bunch of marines crowded around us wanting to know about everything and we found out that President Wilson had ordered President Huerta of Mexico to salute the American flag because of things like we saw that day in front of the newspaper office and when President Huerta told President Wilson to go to hell, President Wilson sent a fleet down. The marines said they had killed thousands of Mexicans there in Vera Cruz.

Then they took us in to see a major and told him where they had found us.

"Sit down," says the major, who was very brisk and hawk-nosed. He looked us over with his

bright blue eyes, and we weren't anything to look at, I can tell you, especially Limo with his straggly, straw-colored whiskers and puffy eyes and face the color of a sick catfish's belly.

"Tell me about it," says the major. "Why were you put in San Juan de Ulloa and how long were you in there? No lies, now, because I'm going to check up on it."

"We'll tell you the gospel truth, sir. I know we couldn't lie to you, sir, not half."

"You're an Englishman," says the major.

"Liverpool born, sir," says Limo, "but naturalized in Boston more than five years ago. So help me, I was, sir, but the Mexicans stole my papers so I can't prove it."

"And you?" says the major, turning his eyes on me. "Where's your home?"

"I ain't got a home," I said.

"Where were you born?"

"Tennessee," I said, putting things across the Mississippi River because I didn't want Grandma and Grandpa to find out about this. "But I haven't got any home there. My mother, she lives in St. Louis with another husband, but I don't ever hear from her."

The major squinted at me as if he thought I

was lying, which I was, and then says, "Well, tell me what happened."

"Yes, sir," says Limo. "You see, sir, the kid and I shipped on the Lorimer boat *Claudia* from New Orleans bound light for a cargo of Honduras bananas. And when we reach Vera Cruz for fuel I speaks to the skipper, Captain Schiller by name, and a kind-hearted gentleman, and asks permission for the kid who has never seen Vera Cruz and me to go ashore and see the sights.

"So Captain Schiller knows there's been trouble between the Mexicans and us and he warns us to keep out of the cantinas and tells us to be back by dark."

The major was looking very closely at Limo, but once in a while would turn and look at me while Limo was talking.

"We went ashore, sir," went on Limo, "and walked uptown and looked over the cathedral, and then over by a newspaper office where there was a crowd reading bulletins about the trouble.

"And by and by"—Limo paused the way political speakers do for effect—"a Mexican came running up to the crowd carrying a small flag—the Star-Spangled Banner, sir. And in front of this

greaser crowd, sir, he spat on your flag and my flag and he held it for the others to spit on, too.

"My blood boiled, sir. I was born in Liverpool as my manner of speech may tell you. But, Gawblimy, I'm as good an American now, asking your pardon, sir, as yourself.

"And I turned to the kid here and I says, 'You're young, but you're a man grown for fighting purposes. And that's the flag that represents liberty. Better men than us has died for Old Glory —come on!'

"So the kid and I rushed into the crowd, bashing in their bloody heads, and Gawblimy, I catches the scummy blighter and hurls him to the pavement and wrenches our flag from him, sir, and thrusts it into my bosom.

"But there was too many of them, sir, and fight as we did, they still battered us down and the police came and dragged us, bloody and cut and bruised, off to the prison where your men rescued us. There, sick, sir, and almost unconscious from my beating, they took away from me the flag, sorry stained with my own blood—British-born blood, sir, but still loyal American."

The major didn't say anything for a little bit —just looked at Limo and me. Then he says

quietly, "That was very courageous and a bit foolhardy too. I'm going to send you over to the *Esmeralda* tomorrow. She's sailing in a day or so with American refugees to Galveston, I think. And I'm going to investigate your case. Did they confiscate your personal property?"

"Yes, sir," says Limo, "naturalization papers, money, razor—everything."

"Well, I shall attempt to get restitution of those things, and if your story stands up, I'm going to recommend that you get some official recognition for your valor."

"Oh, no, sir," says Limo. "I'm not looking for honor. All I'm asking, if you'll pardon me, sir, is the chance to go back to San Juan de Ulloa and in the commandant's office see if I can find the little flag that was taken from me."

"Our men," said the major, "are going through everything there. I'll give word that the flag be returned to you if they find it."

So they gave us a chance to take a bath and get rid of our livestock and a marine cut our hair and shaved off Limo's whiskers and they gave us some clean new dungarees to wear.

We had to tell our story over and over to the marines and sailors, and it picked up new details

with almost every telling and we were becoming pretty famous heroes around this warehouse. And the marines and soldiers would curse and clench their teeth about the inhuman treatment we had and about the insult to the flag and then, maybe, go out and kill off a few Mexicans in revenge.

Along in the afternoon, after we'd had a good dinner with the marines, Limo was feeling pretty good and he got me to one side.

"Nipper," he says, "we got to get away from here."

"Why?" I asked. I was having a swell time and was perfectly willing to stay with the marines a while.

"They're checking up on this fairy tale I gave 'em," said Limo, "and we hasn't got a chance. Blimy, they'll send us up to Galveston and first thing we know we goes on trial on charges of God knows what. We got to slip away from here quiet like and trek up the coast to Tampico where we can ship on a good British boat. That's why I told the major I wanted to go back looking for the flag—maybe we'd get a chance to slip away from all these marines if we could get away from the warehouse. Don't know for certain they ain't got us under polite arrest."

I didn't like the idea at all, and I said, "Look here, how far is it from here to this Tampico?"

"Oh, I don't know," says Limo. "Two hundred and fifty, maybe three hundred miles right up the coast."

"Well," I says, "how is a fellow that's as sick and weak as you ever going to walk two or three hundred miles in this country?"

"Don't worry about me," says Limo. "Out in the sunshine and away from that prison I'll be getting better every day. And we'll take it slow and live off the country."

"Now, wait a minute," I objected. "You say maybe it's three hundred miles to Tampico. And suppose you can stand up to twenty miles a day. That's five days for a hundred miles and more than two weeks of walking before we get to Tampico."

"What's two weeks of walking to two or three years in a Yankee prison?" says Limo. "I just got my fill of prisons, not half. Now you go back in the galley and see can you lift a can of bully beef and a loaf of bread and I'll steal one of these marine's canteens and what else I can get and we'll slip away about the time they're holding their retreat tonight."

So I finally went back in the galley and told the cookey that I was starved and he fixes me up a sandwich while I lifts a can of salmon and a loaf of bread and stick them up under my dungaree jumper. And when I got back Limo had a canteen of water and a bayonet stuck under his jumper.

"We got to get out before dusk," says Limo, "because I find out they got sentries everywhere and won't let nobody past without a pass at night. Maybe we better risk it right now."

So we just got up from the bunks that had been given us and walked out of the warehouse like we knew where we were going. We took a side street that ran roughly north along the water front and kept on the move. When we sighted marines or sailors we didn't pay any attention and they seemed to think we were other sailors or marines out on a job in working dungarees, and in no time at all we were clear out of the city and out in the low, swampy country next to the seacoast.

Limo was pretty cheerful and joking until we got out on this narrow dirt road and I could see he was about worn out.

So I pulled up under a scrubby tree and sat down on a mound of clean white sand. "Let's take

a rest," I said. "We're well shut of the city, and they ain't going to be looking for us out here."

Limo sat down beside me and didn't say anything. The sun had just gone down and you could see the ocean off beyond the hill, with the eastern sky a faint pink from reflecting the sunset, and there was a cool wind blowing and some gulls swooping and screeching over the beach looking for dead fish. It was all very nice after the prison.

"Pretty tired, Limo?" I asked.

Limo sighed. "A bit fagged, Nipper, and I think we've come no more than five miles."

He lay back flat on the hard sand.

"Maybe we'd better stay right here for the night," I suggested.

Limo sat up. "Oh," he said, "I could go on twicet this far today after I rest myself a bit. But, blimy, I don't know as there's a reason. If we try to travel at night we may get lost in this forsaken country. And I'll be strong as strong tomorrow. Let's move round on the other side of the hill so none of these Mexicans coming along the road can see us. Then we'll have a dinner from that can of fish."

So we went around on the lee side of the hill and worried the can of salmon open with the

bayonet and haggled off some bread. We would dump the salmon thick on a piece of bread and eat it that way, with a drink now and then from the canteen, and we ate all of the salmon and half of the bread because Limo said the salmon would spoil in the can and kill us.

By that time the stars were out and we just lay down on the sand and went to sleep because we hadn't slept any the night before with the shooting going on.

The next morning when I woke up in the dawn with little birds skittering and chirping around the bushes, Limo was sitting up hugging his knees and thinking. He looked some better than the day before.

"Awake, Nipper?" he says, when he saw my eyes open.

I told him I was awake.

"Well," he says and sort of hesitates before going on, "Nipper, I'm going to leave you today."

"What do you mean, leave me?" I said, getting up astonished.

"I'm going back to Vera Cruz."

"Well," says I, "if you can't go on to Tampico, I certainly ain't going alone. I'll go back to Vera

Cruz with you. I never did think so much of that Tampico idea anyhow."

"It's not that," says Limo, shaking his head. "I could make it to Tampico all proper enough. And that's the right thing for us to do. It's the thing for you to do, at least."

"Look here—I'd like to know what you're talking about," I said. "Why's it the proper thing for me to go to Tampico and the proper thing for you to go back to Vera Cruz if you're strong enough to walk it? Tell me that."

Limo half grinned. "Remember when Alicia came to San Juan de Ulloa?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, Alicia tells me then that she thinks she's going to have a baby. Now of course there's a chance I'm not the papa. But she thinks I am and, blimy, I probably am. Now, I asks you, what kind of scut would I be to run away and leave her that way? So I'm going back to Vera Cruz and help Alicia and her ma run the cantina."

So Limo went back and I went with him, hiding out in the cantina for a couple of weeks. Then things were opening up again and Limo helped me get a berth on a British tramp and I went to Liverpool for the first time.

Every time I got to Vera Cruz after that I would go and see Limo and Alicia. The last time he was getting pretty fat and with pouches under his eyes from sampling the cantina goods too much. They had three pretty dark kids.

SIX

Now there are two things I want to bring out about me and that experience in San Juan de Ulloa with Limo.

One of these things is that while I was in prison I really got to thinking. You might say that I built up a hull of thought and launched it there when I was less than fifteen years old. Most people live all their lives and never even get that hull

built, and any thinking they do is sort of aimless like a ship without a course plotted or a compass or a chart, so of course they never get anywhere at all.

But when I had this hull of thought launched you can see that I had something to build on in the years that came after. From every voyage, almost, I could take something to add to the superstructure or engine room, and the same with experiences ashore.

And sometimes when we would get way down in the tropics where the stars would look like a tall man could reach up from the flying bridge and pick them out of the sky and when I'd be at the wheel or on lookout and everything quiet except the easy pound of the engines down in the ship and the wide-awake ruffle of the sea alongside her, why I'd be working all this over in my head and thinking and studying on what it's all about until it would seem that I almost could pull loose from my moorings right then and steam out in the Black Ocean where nobody has ever been.

But I couldn't quite make it. The trouble was that a man thinks almost entirely with words, and I didn't have the words. I hadn't gone to a regular

school enough, and I hadn't got my thought ship ready for its voyage.

I knew that I needed words so I could think to a certain stage, set down what I had thought, get a fresh hold and think a little further. I realized that all right, but I didn't know what to do about it—that is, I didn't know until I got acquainted with Marie. I have to give Marie an awful lot of credit in this thing, but all of that will come later.

The other thing I want to bring out is about nerve.

It is going to take a brave man to sail alone out over the Black Ocean, a much braver man than Christopher Columbus, for instance, unless he knows he is right. If he isn't absolutely sure he's right, every moment he'll be thinking that he hasn't any business there and that he's sort of peeking through a keyhole at God's private affairs, and he won't get very far with thoughts like that jumping at him, even if he is as brave a man as I am.

Probably I am not much braver, naturally, than the average fellow. I know I was some scared down there in San Juan de Ulloa, although I don't think I was any more so than Limo, who

was a man grown and experienced. The reason I seem so very brave now is because I know I don't have anything to fear. It's this way: Suppose you were down in the Solomon Islands and a big airplane came flying over and circled the island to get its bearings, with its motors howling like a hurricane. The niggers probably would think the airplane was some devil-god come to wipe them out for their sins and they would bump their heads on the ground. You might get considerable reputation for bravery from those niggers because you weren't afraid, but you wouldn't be entitled to that reputation because you knew all along that the airplane wasn't going to hurt you unless it happened to fall on you. And it's the same way with me now.

There are a lot of angles to what seems to be bravery, just a lot of angles.

On the face of it, about the bravest thing I ever saw was done by a little, skinny, consumptive kid. I'll tell you about it.

You remember about me going up to St. Louis to see my mother and her mail clerk husband after Grandpa and Grandma were dead? I thought I had some money coming from the estate because Grandpa had willed it to me, but I found that

Mother and her mail clerk had gone through with it.

Well, that didn't worry me much because, thanks to Limo's lessons, I had become a pretty good dice scientist, and while I still had considerable trouble on a rolling ship, I could make good money anyhow. I would spend most of my science money ashore, but I had an emergency stake of eight hundred or a thousand dollars in the Bank of Italy savings department in San Francisco and I had a couple hundred more in my pocket.

I didn't stay at the house with Mom because the mail clerk didn't seem very anxious for me to be around. I went downtown to a little hotel and at the hotel a negro bellhop says, "Wouldn't like a little gambling, would you, cap'n?" And me, thinking he meant crap shooting, told him to lead me to it.

It wasn't a crap game, but five gents wearing derby hats sitting around a round table playing stud poker in a small room. They took me like five seagoing tugs taking a coastwise tramp downtide. When I got out of that room in a couple of hours, I had just twelve dollars and a half left.

I suppose I could have taken my San Francisco pass book to a St. Louis bank and they would have

telegraphed the Bank of Italy and got me some money. But I didn't know that. I just knew that you couldn't draw checks on a savings account and figured the only way I could get any of my money was to go to San Francisco, and I had to go to blue water somewhere to catch a ship anyhow, so I sent my suitcase to myself in San Francisco by express and then went down in the railroad yards and climbed into an empty boxcar on the Chicago and Alton and rode to Kansas City.

In the boxcar was a friendly old tramp by the name of Ford, who was called Model T, and Model T was bound for California too, because it was late October and getting quite chilly at night. It was especially cold the night we got into Kansas City, because it was raining and dreary.

We got out of the car at the beginning of the Kansas City yards at the foot of a bluff three or four hundred feet high with street lights shining on top of it through the fog and drizzle, and on the other side of us a lot of tracks and switch lights and the Missouri River over there a couple of blocks.

Model T said, "We try to ride through this town and nine times out of ten we get caught and their jail is worse than common. So if you got a

quarter, the best thing is to climb that hill and take a streetcar and ride over in Kansas City, Kansas, and catch the Santa Fe there."

"I got a quarter," I told him, "but not so much more."

"On second thought," says Model T, "the best thing is to spend that quarter for hamburgers and coffee and walk down here across the bridge and catch the Burlington for Omaha. Then we got a straight stretch on the U. P. for Frisco. That's where you want to go, ain't it, Slim?"

So we went walking down between the tracks in the cold drizzle until we came to an old shack where they used to keep handcars or something and there was a light shining through a dirty window and you could hear voices inside.

"There's stiffs in there," said Model T, "and maybe they've got scoffings." He meant there were more hoboes in the shack and that maybe they had something to eat.

So he pulled the door open and there were half a dozen tramps in there, all right, but they weren't eating.

Four of them were sitting on the floor around a very dirty yellow and blue quilt, playing stud

poker for pennies and the other two were just leaning against the walls watching.

"Can we come in out of the rain a bit?" asked Model T.

Nobody in the game said anything. But a long-legged ragged fellow about forty leaning against the wall says in the language they speak on the Mississippi delta, "Suah—mak yo'sef at home."

So we went in and leaned against the wall too, watching the game. It seemed kind of strained in there, as if things hadn't been going too pleasant, if you understand what I mean.

One of the players was a young, black-haired fellow who looked as if he might be a sailor. He was sitting on our right. Opposite us was a squat, heavy-set man with about the cruelest face I ever saw. His nose was a blob of red meat. His mouth was like a crooked unhealed scar. His eyes were mean, black slits. He was wearing a rusty old derby hat that made him remind me of the poker players in St. Louis although he didn't really look like any of them.

On our left was a redheaded, fat tramp and with his back toward us was the skinny, consumptive kid I was telling you about. When he would turn his head you could see that he wasn't more

than seventeen or eighteen at the most and that his face was waxy-white except for those fever spots on the cheekbones that tell you a fellow hasn't got long to live unless he takes proper care of himself.

Three of these poker players at least seemed quite serious about it. They had two candles stuck in old bottles down there on the quilt, and while the candles made quite a bit of light, it was difficult for the players to make out their hole cards because the shadows came the wrong way and because the cards were so old and dirty that the spots weren't very plain anyhow.

When the first two cards were dealt, instead of just lifting up the corner of the hole card, the way stud poker players generally do, these tramps would have to lift them clear up and shield them with their hands so the other players couldn't see and twist around to let the light fall right so they could make out their own hole card. Then they would bet a penny like it was fifty dollars.

Afterwhile, when the cards were being shuffled, the fat, redheaded tramp looked up at Model T and me and sort of grinned.

"Want a hand?" he asked.

"Ain't got any pennies," said Model T.

I just shook my head. I had had enough of stud poker in St. Louis to last me a while, although if they had been shooting craps it would have been different.

We stood in there watching for a while, with the rain going drizzle-drizzle off the roof, and me not much interested, but feeling very hungry instead and wondering if I should ditch Model T or buy him a hamburger sandwich and coffee or stake him to a regular meal at the risk of running clear out of money before I got to San Francisco.

Sometimes this ragged kid would turn his head and cough very hard, so hard that it would double him up a bit and you could see that it hurt him. And once the cough caught him before he could turn and it nearly put one of the candles out.

"Don't go blowing your God-damn bugs over this way," the tough tramp said. When he talked he hardly opened his mouth—just a little at one side the way ventriloquists do in shows when they are making those wooden dolls talk on their knees.

The kid didn't say a word, just hauled a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his mouth.

The tough tramp was shuffling the cards, having some trouble because they were frayed on the

edges. Then he began to deal and he dealt the hole cards face down and the second cards face up and somebody bet a penny and everybody stayed. And the cards went around again and again until it was the last time around and on the last card the tough tramp dealt himself an ace.

"Wait a minute!" The consumptive kid had been sitting with his legs crossed like a Constantinople beggar. But he pulled himself forward suddenly and squatted on his knees with his feet sticking out behind him. There were holes clear through the soles of both his shoes, showing his bare feet, and under the fringed rags of his soggy, wet pants his naked ankles were very skinny and dirty too on each side of the big tendon that runs from the heel into your calf.

"Wait a minute," the consumptive kid says again to the tough tramp on the other side of the quilt, "you son of a bitch, I caught you that time. You dolt that ace from the bottom of the deck."

The tough guy blinked his eyes in the candlelight as if he couldn't believe what he heard. Then he moved quick. He dropped the deck of cards. His right hand shoved inside his coat and came out again with a big revolver—a big, short-

barreled revolver, the kind they call a belly gun, and he held it low, pointing at the kid's middle. His scar of a mouth moved just a little bit, but his voice was very plain.

"Say that again," he says, "and I'll blow the guts out of you. I don't take that from nobody, let alone a—"

Model T and I were standing right behind the kid in direct line of the gun. We edged around to the side by the door. There was no mistaking it, the tough guy meant what he said. You didn't need more than to see him there with his old derby on the back of his head and the grizzled black hair over his forehead to know that here was a man that wouldn't lose sleep over a murder. You didn't even have to see the gun and the way he held it to know that.

But this kid, squatting on the edge of the blue and yellow quilt with his cards in front of him and a couple of nickels and four or five pennies and the flush of T. B. on his face, glared right back at this tough guy, not even paying any attention to the belly gun, for maybe five seconds with the rain still going drizzle-drizzle off the shack roof.

And then the kid said with more sarcasm than

anybody could write, "Why, you cheap, penny-stealing son of a bitch." He drawled in a very nasty way. "Anybody what's so low they would cheat in a penny game hasn't got guts enough to squash a louse, let alone shoot a man—"

And just that instant the gun went off with a flash of fire and a roar like a cannon in that little shack.

The kid's face twisted. His mouth opened like he was going to say something. He hunched his skinny shoulders. Then his eyes shut tight as if he was in a terrible agony and his arms gave way and he slumped on the side of his face on that dirty blue and yellow quilt with the candle flames fluttering above him and he sort of sighed and a gush of bright red blood came out of his mouth and mixed with the blue and yellow on the quilt.

Model T jerked the door open. We both slipped out into the rain away from the smell of wet, dirty clothes and powder smoke.

"Jesus," said Model T, "that ain't any of our mix. We better get away from this place quick before we get tangled in it."

We found a street running down the bottoms from the railroad tracks and a hash house where I bought Model T and myself a whole hamburger

steak and potatoes and coffee apiece to quiet our nerves before we went out and hopped a freight for Omaha.

Now, about this consumptive kid being brave enough to sit there and cuss this tough guy who was holding a gun on him, maybe he was very brave and maybe he wasn't. There is no way of telling unless you knew what went before, and there is no way to find that out.

Suppose this consumptive kid had been reading books and believed what he read. In that case he would believe that a man who was mean enough to cheat in a penny poker game and who would pull a gun that way was a coward and wouldn't have nerve enough to shoot. If he believed that strong enough, it wouldn't take very much bravery to cuss him out. But the fact is that it doesn't take so very much nerve to wiggle your finger on a gun trigger. The worst coward in the world can do that, and I have seen it. If this kid knew that and just thought he would take a chance at bluffing the tough guy, then he probably was very brave, but you can't even be sure about that. Here this kid was ragged and wet and sick and no doubt knew he was going to die anyhow pretty soon and he felt pretty bad most of

the time. Well, if he took all that into consideration, it wasn't so much of a gamble. He didn't have much to lose even if the tough guy did pull the trigger, and if he bluffed him out that would make him feel kind of good and proud of himself for a little while anyhow.

SEVEN

Then about the navy captain I saw in Hong Kong:

I forget the name of the joint, but it was that place with a chit by Kipling framed on the wall. Kipling was an English writer of books. A chit is what you call an I.O.U. in the United States.

This navy captain was pretty drunk, and he had a woman with him, about half Portugee by

the face of her, and she looked to me like she ought to have the yellow quarantine flag flying at her masthead, if you understand what I mean.

Dick Lee was with me and we had good shore clothes on and money in our pockets because I was a scientist and because he didn't gamble at all. So you see this navy captain, being quite drunk, never had an idea that we were a couple of deckaroos off a freighter.

Once that captain raised his voice and we heard him say to the woman, "Couple American gentlemen over there. Must go have drink with American gentlemen."

She put her hand on his arm to stop him and we didn't pay any attention, because you learn not to have anything to do with navy officers. Navy sailors aren't so bad, but navy officers can't do you any good and may do you a lot of harm. I have known it to happen that way a number of times ashore.

By and by a navy petty officer slipped into the place and saluted the captain and said something low.

The captain reared back in his chair and stuck out his wet underlip. He blinked at the petty officer a moment, trying to look very important.

Then he slapped his hand on the table and roared out: "Cap'n Blunk's comp'ments officer of the deck. And tell the boat to stand by. Tell 'em Cap'n Blunk not ready to come yet. Tell boat to stand by."

The petty officer looked pretty worried. He bent over and whispered to the captain.

"Tell 'at boat stand by," the captain bellowed. Then he saw that Dick Lee and I were watching like everybody else in the place and says, "I gotta have drink with American gen'men."

Dick Lee and I had been drinking Scotch and soda which is the thing in Hong Kong, and a very good drink any place if you want to drink. We didn't like it very well when this captain, gold braid all over his uniform, came weaving over to our table carrying a shot glass full of liquor. He slapped his hand down and whooped out: "Stand up, you bullies, and drink with Cap'n Blunk to th' 'nited States navy."

Dick and I stood up and Dick looked the red-faced captain in the eye and raised his glass. "Here," he says, "is to Ivory Soap—99 and 44/100 per cent pure and it floats. What more can you say for the navy?"

The captain tossed off his shot of liquor. Then

he blinked his eyes and scowled at Dick Lee, thinking what he had drunk to. He gulped once or twice and then said, very solemn, "You insulted the service. You insulted th' dignity an' honor of the 'nited States navy."

For a moment everything got quiet in the place, amazingly quiet, except for that funny, squeaky, tinkly Chinese music going lickety-split over in the corner.

Then the captain smacked his shot glass down on our table, hunched up his shoulders and made a rush for Dick Lee. But he had to run around me to get at Dick and I popped him on the chin with my right fist as he was going by, and the captain never got as far as Dick.

The navy petty officer looked down at his gold-braided captain out cold on the floor. Then he looked up at me and kind of grinned.

"Thanks," says he. "Now would you mind helping me tote him out to the sidecar?"

So I picked up the captain under the arms and the petty officer picked up his legs, and we carried him out the narrow door and dumped him like an embroidered sack of potatoes into the motorcycle.

The petty officer bummed a cigarette from me

and climbed on the seat. And as the motor started the navy captain half waked up and raised his head from the sidecar. "Tell that boat to stand by," he bawled in a very thick voice.

Dick Lee and I stood there a little while listening to the motorcycle echoing down the narrow old street, and then we went back into the joint and finished our Scotch and soda.

Now, you say, what in hell does all that add up to?

Why, you say, bother writing about a navy officer just getting drunk and objectionable in a Hong Kong honky-tonk? What's it amount to?

Well, it doesn't amount to anything, and it amounts to a great deal. It just depends on how deep you want to go into it. The thing that bothered me was why a big, fine navy captain would get himself blotto in a joint like that just the same as a deck hand on a tramp freighter. I don't have to tell you why the deck hand gets drunk—he is ignorant and he lives a tough life and there isn't anything much else for him to do when he gets ashore. But it's quite different with a navy captain. Maybe I can explain it so you'll understand what I mean.

I studied and studied about that, and I re-

member when I figured it out. I was at the wheel and it was one of those cloudy days in the China Sea. Clouds tumbled up so black they were almost purple on the horizon. And the sea black that way too. Only way off there'd be long streaks of bright, glittery silver where the sun was breaking through. And every once in a while a hatful of wind would zip out of somewhere and there'd be a quick popping up of whitecaps on the dark ocean and the rain would sting my face for a minute. Then it would quit.

And all this time I would be holding her on her course and fretting about this navy captain.

You've got to have some brains to be a navy captain and you have to be well educated too. You've got to be graduated from the navy academy at Annapolis before you can be even an ensign, which is sort of a third mate, and you've had to study all sorts of things besides just how to navigate and fire a navy gun. And if an officer gets to be a captain with twelve or fourteen hundred men under him he's had to keep right on with his studying.

That was what was bothering me. Here was this navy captain, skipper of one of the finest battleships afloat. He would be making loads of

money and would probably have a real lady for a wife back home and some nice kids. He didn't have to go to dives. When his ship made a port fine people on shore would invite him to their fine houses for dinner.

Everything was built to make this guy think he was pretty important—the swell gold braid on his uniforms and all the thousands of sailors and lower officers in the navy having to salute and scrape to him.

But I wondered if sometimes at night when he was in his bunk and not sleeping he wouldn't get to thinking something like this:

"Sure, I'm a pretty big, important guy all right. Here I'm skipper of this big warship, and there's more than a thousand men aboard who've got to stand up and click their heels together when I come along.

"But after all just what the devil am I anyhow? And what's this battleship? And what's this ocean? And what's the world and the sun and the stars and the sky?"

You know this navy captain must know how to think or he wouldn't ever have got to be a navy captain. He's got all the school education there is, and he knows how to chart a course when he's

thinking. He's got all the words in his head, the tools to think with, and he knows how to use those tools, so he starts thinking his way out of the harbor where most people stay all their lives, and he thinks his way out into that big Black Ocean toward the land where the Truth is.

And as this navy captain is thinking his way all of a sudden he gets scared. He's got no charts to follow. No explorers have ever been out that way to make maps. For all he knows all the devils of hell are crouching out there waiting to jump on him. It's much worse than Christopher Columbus because he can't feel any deck under his feet and he's all alone. You've got to make this voyage by yourself. You can't even take a dog along for company like that Captain Joshua Slocum did in sailing around the world.

So this navy captain gets scared of the awful lonesomeness in the Black Ocean and he throws his helm hard to port and races back to the harbor full steam ahead.

Afterwards, of course, he's ashamed of himself. He knows he can navigate his brain better than one man out of thousands. He knows he's got what you might call the ship and the supplies to make the only voyage worth while. But he knows that

he'll never be brave enough to go out into the Black Ocean again. He knows that he never can forget how horribly afraid he was, but he tries and tries to forget.

He knows deep down in his heart that he is just a miserable yellow-belly, but he struts around and yells for boats to stand by, trying to make everybody else think he's important and not guess how little he really is. But that little old white fear worm keeps gnawing away inside his head. He keeps remembering, no matter how often he says to himself at night up there on the bridge, "Hell, it's all imagination. I've never been scared because I've never been out of the harbor, and what good would the Truth be anyhow, even if you did sail across the Black Ocean?" And the more he remembers, the harder it is to feel important. And he begins to doubt whether he's really putting it over on the sailors scrubbing the deck. And by and by he gets so he can't feel big to himself except when he can get off and fill his skin with hard liquor.

If I had that navy captain's education I would have sailed right across the Black Ocean long ago and I would have brought back the Truth. But I am only now learning the real way to navigate my

brain. Even now, I have been farther out than anybody before. And I wasn't afraid.

You've got to study things out from the beginning this way: You know that plants won't grow without sunshine, except certain kinds of plants like mushrooms, which get their sunshine second-handed. So grass and corn and wheat they have got sunshine in them and when cows and hogs eat the grass and corn and wheat they have the sunshine and when you eat the beef and pork you have the sunshine. That is very simple. Anyone can see that life is sunshine, but the trouble is to find out what is sunshine.

Once, before I had gone very far with this thing, I thought I had found out the way to figure. You don't see very many Jew sailors, but there was a Jew by the name of Wunsdorf who was red-hot to be a skipper, and he was studying all the time to learn navigation and all so he could get a third mate's ticket. When he was off watch he would sit at the table in the forecastle working problems and he had a book on algebra which I had heard about but hadn't got to in school.

At that time I was shipping pretty regularly from Rotterdam to New York for a purpose and so was this Wunsdorf for the same purpose and

we knew what each other was doing so that made us sort of buddies although I really didn't care so much for him. So one night I sat down at the table with him and he got to showing me how algebra started, which I could understand a little because I already knew as far as long division and some fractions in arithmetic.

Right off I got interested. It seemed like there were big possibilities in this algebra business, if you could learn it all and then carry it further. So when we got to Rotterdam and I had bought about a hundred and fifty dollars' worth of a rock which I could peddle quite easily in New York for nearly three hundred with no trouble whatsoever, because no one ever figures on a seaman on a freighter bringing in diamonds, I tried to find an algebra book in English without any luck and saw I would have to wait until we got back to the States unless we pulled in at Portsmouth or Plymouth in England as we sometimes did on the way back.

But on the way home we had a passenger, which was unusual, and very unusual for this kind of a passenger. He was slim and dark and very well-dressed and wore a little black mustache and spoke English with the strong English accent that

Frenchmen and Russians and sometimes Germans speak when they have learned the language in one of their colleges.

Wunsdorf was worried about this passenger because he had bought five or six hundred dollars' worth of ice in Rotterdam, not being a scientist and being quite greedy and not willing to be always on the safe side and keep himself under control. He was afraid that this slick passenger might be some kind of a detective looking out for just that kind of business.

I wasn't bothering myself much about him, because I only had one rock the size you would pay maybe four hundred dollars for in a New York retail store if you were buying your girl a ring and I could hide this rock easily if it came to a general frisking. And I didn't think it was really dishonest, because nobody lost anything by me bringing in the rocks. You see, if I didn't bring them into the United States, they probably never would get here anyhow and there was no use of feeling sorry for the government not getting duty on something that's in a shop now in Rotterdam and finally is going to be bought by a German or Rumanian or Englishman and never in the world come across the Atlantic.

Well, one warm night in the Gulf Stream, I'd just come off watch and was leaning against the main deck starboard rail watching the phosphorus shine on the little waves and this slick passenger came strolling along.

"Pleasant evening," he says in the way a man talks when he wants to get acquainted with a woman in a strange port.

"Suits me," I said, sort of in the way the woman replies when she doesn't care much for the man's looks, but still doesn't want to tell him to go jump in the drink.

But he had a quiet, educated way about him and he started to asking me how I liked sailoring and what I thought of the United States as compared to France and Germany and Sweden and China and Russia and England and other places.

There are two ways of asking questions. One is the real curious eager way that some folks have of sticking their noses into your business, and they never find out much except lies. The other way is the easy, friendly way of making conversation, where you don't really ask questions at all, but trade opinions and ideas. This passenger had the second system, and because he seemed quite smart

and a nice fellow I saw a chance to learn something and asked him a question.

"I've been thinking somewhat about algebra," I said, "and maybe you could tell me some things I want to know."

He kind of laughed a little and lit a cigarette. In the flare of his silver lighter I could see his black eyes shine friendly.

"I'm not exactly a mathematician," he said "but I studied algebra in my youth. What is the problem?"

"Well," I said, "I was thinking about all this." I waved my hand at the Atlantic Ocean and the sky.

"All what?" he asked, a little puzzled.

"Well, the world and the sky and the sun, and what they're all about and what started them."

The passenger was standing away from the rail with his hands in his ulster pockets and swaying with the ship when the old tub wallowed through the swells. I could see that I'd got him pretty interested.

"I've found out," I said, "that in algebra you work with letters as well as with figures. I've found out that you let the letter *x* stand for what

you don't know, and you let some other letters and figures stand for what you do know. As near as I can make out, you shuffle the letters and figures you do know around with the x and if you follow a set course by and by you've got the x tied up with another letter and a figure—say, y^2. And when you've got xy^2 tied together and see that they amount to sixty-two and you knew in the beginning that y^2 stood for twelve, it's just plain subtraction to see that x stands for fifty."

"Yes," he said, "I understand."

"Well," I went on, "what I'm getting at is this: if a fellow was real good at working this algebra stuff, why couldn't he work out anything with it? Why couldn't he work out everything?

"I mean, why couldn't he use things instead of just numbers? Say you let y^2 stand for a steamship and a stand for a plate of beans and k stand for a pair of pants. You know what steamships and beans and pants are, so you could let x stand for a star. In working the problem you'd shuffle the steamship and the pants and the beans around with the star, find out what they amount to together and then subtract them from x and you'll have the dope on the star."

The passenger sort of chuckled and drew on his cigarette. "Go on," he said.

"Well," I said, "when you know about the star, you could let the star be a and the pair of pants be k and the ship y^2 and the sun be x, and find out about the sun. Then you could let the star stay a and the pair of pants k and the sun be y^2 and find out about God, see? This way you're working forward all the time. And when you've got the dope on the star and the sun and God, it ought to be easy to let x stand for What's the Big Idea of Everything, and work that out too."

The passenger was grinning sort of doubtful in the starlight.

"Of course," I told him, "you'd have to work this all out by degrees. When you start on a voyage to Sydney, say, from Frisco, you don't plot your course straight to Sydney. You've probably got to stop at Honolulu for coal. And you've got to stop again at Guam or Shanghai or Singapore for coal again because it's a long trip."

"Yes," said the passenger, kind of soft, "and if you travel far enough, you go right around the world and land where you started."

"Sure," I said, "but with this algebra voyage

we're not running around the world—we're shooting straight off into space, up past the stars and the sun."

"There's a man named Einstein," he said, "who knows more about those regions than anyone else alive." The passenger lit another cigarette and gave me one. "And Einstein says space is also curved. I'm afraid that even if your algebra ship should make such a voyage it would finally land back home, weather-beaten and covered with barnacles, without having made any discoveries.

"I'll tell you, my friend," he went on, "the defects in your plan—if you want me to."

"Shoot," I said, "that's what I'm looking for."

"Well," he looked at me and smiled, "you're going at the problem wrong from the very start. I mean you don't really know about your ship and beans and pants to begin with. If you really knew what you call the Big Idea of Everything and if you really knew about the sun, why, you might work back and find out about the ship and the beans and the pants."

"Hell," I said, "I've been a seaman long enough so I ought to know something about beans."

"All right," said the passenger, "tell me what are beans."

And then all of a sudden I saw what the passenger meant. I saw that I really didn't know anything about beans or steamships or anything that I saw every day any more than I knew about the sun. I saw they were all hooked up with the sun and, you might say, part of the sun and maybe God too. And I saw that you never in the world could work out What's the Big Idea of Everything with algebra or any other kind of arithmetic.

"There was another man," said the passenger, "who wrote some books, and he had an idea of working out things with mathematics too. His name was Spinoza."

I had the passenger spell out this Spinoza's name for me and I wrote it down in my little notebook. So when we got back to New York I didn't bother about buying an algebra book. I bought instead a thick book called the *Philosophy of Spinoza* and tried to read it. But that book was a big laugh. Spinoza was a Spanish Jew, and he might just as well have written his book in Spanish Jew for all the sense anybody could get out of it. I guess Spinoza had enough education and was

maybe brave enough to go out of the harbor where the navy captain was afraid to go, but his head was so muddled up with big words that he couldn't plot a course, and he ran round and round in the black tide rips like a ship with its steering machinery gone crazy, shipping water at every turn and spouting jawbreaking words like sky rockets.

Once when I was on one of those Ward liners they had a big dumb nigger in the galley named Estey and I named this nigger Spinoza because he talked like this book—he was always jettisoning a stream of big, high-sounding words that didn't mean a thing in the world just to sound important.

I have told you all this to show that this passenger was undoubtedly directed to ship on our freighter just to set me straight. There probably aren't many men in the world as smart as this passenger and I don't even know his name. But because I didn't have school education, I might have wasted years studying algebra when it couldn't do me any good, if it hadn't been for this passenger who wasn't really a detective checking up on diamonds at all as Wunsdorf was afraid,

but I never did find out why he took our ship instead of a fine passenger liner unless God sent him especially to keep me from getting mixed up.

EIGHT

If I hadn't ever met Marie, I probably never could have got enough education to write this book. And that's not saying anything even about getting prepared for my voyage across the Black Ocean, which is the real reason for me being the kind of a man that I am.

But there were a lot of things that might have kept me from getting acquainted with Marie at

all. There were a lot of things that might easily have put me in dry dock or even landed me in a cove for good—like those old Shipping Board vessels that are lined up and rotting in Brooklyn.

When I look back I think maybe Jeanne was one of the biggest dangers because I thought I was in love with her and it would have been pretty easy for Jeanne to have ruined everything if it hadn't been for God or whatever power it was directing me on.

We were swinging up the Bay of Biscay in the seven-thousand-ton *Anthony Lundstrom* when the drive shaft cracked and we had to swing over and pull into Brest at about five knots an hour.

There had been some trouble in the forecastle because a squarehead named Bergstein got sore when he lost thirty dollars and I broke his nose. Most of the crew had also lost money and took sides with Bergstein and I wasn't very popular when we got to Brest and was thinking some of jumping ship, which was a thing I rarely did.

So, when we were tied up in Brest for a week or ten days, I didn't run around with the rest of the crew but traveled mostly lone wolf. I went to a castle, very old, which was built first by Julius Caesar before Columbus discovered America and

went to a museum where there were loads of oil paintings and statues, but one painting in particular about two fathoms deep which was so real that it made you creep.

And this painting showed a prison yard in the early morning with a fine-looking gentleman saying good-bye to his wife or girl friend while a very muscular, mean-looking man stood by ready to cut off the gentleman's head with a long-bladed knife something like a sword only longer and more murderous-looking. And right next to the painting, to show that it was no fake, that very knife was hanging with its blade still red from the gentleman's blood.

Well, one morning I was down by the breakwall, where the red-sailed fish boats tied up in droves and I got to talking to two fishermen who were about ready to start out for the day's work. They both had tremendous mustaches and wore stocking caps and black and white striped sweaters and wooden shoes.

I had to look up words in a French book I had bought, which made my talk kind of slow, but I got along all right with them. I said, "Je aider vous attrape poisson?" which is French for, "Do you want me to help you catch some fish?"

The same way you have trouble understanding a Greek or Russian who talks English but with a Greek or Russian accent, these fishermen had a little trouble understanding me because I had an American accent. But finally they got the drift that I was offering to help them without pay and they laughed and laughed and said, "Oui, oui, oui. Poisson avec persil." Which I found out later from Jeanne that they meant I should come and help them catch some fish with parsley on it. They meant that as a joke, but they motioned for me to hop down in the boat, which was as square-built as an Arkansas brick smokehouse, and I did, and the older of the two Frenchmen fitted a sweep in the stern and cast off and started sculling around the breakwall. The younger fellow named François and pronounced Francewah, hauled up the big red leg-of-mutton sail and caught the breeze and by and by we went tearing along over the choppy bay at about two knots.

Finally we got out to the fishing grounds and François pulled down most of the red sail and Claude, the older fisherman, got out the net and let it overside.

François would pay out the net while Claude sculled the boat, swinging in a half circle. Then

they would haul in the net, me helping, dumping whatever fish there were flopping and shining in the bottom of the boat. But there weren't many fish and François and Claude would mutter and swear in French and say, "pah bone, pah bone," and shrug their shoulders and twist their big mustaches and try it again. Then, maybe that whole big net would only have two or three smallish fish in it.

I got to thinking about that story in the Bible that I learned in the Methodist Sunday school when I was a kid back home. You know the story about the time that Jesus Christ went fishing with some fishermen and the fishermen were having the same kind of luck François and Claude were having. And finally Jesus Christ says to the fishermen, "Try the other side of the boat." And the fishermen heaved the net over the other side of the boat and when they hauled it in it was so heavy with fish they couldn't hardly handle it. So the fishermen knew they had Jesus Christ aboard.

Well, I was thinking of that and sort of as a joke I looked up in my French book and says, "Autre flanc de la bateau," and waved my hand at the other side of the boat.

The Frenchmen just looked at me and didn't say anything.

So I said again and very firm, "Autre flanc de la bateau," and Claude started to talk very fast and kind of mad at me, letting go the tiller so he could wave his hands better. When he had run down a bit and gave me a chance, I just shrugged my shoulders the way they did and says, "Well, pal, it's no skin off my nose, but it worked once and it might work again, I should think. If I was in your place I'd heave the net autre flanc de la bateau." Then I made motions with my hands like putting the net over the port side.

I could see that François was impressed. And he and Claude talked back and forth for a while and finally old Claude pulled his stocking cap over one ear and said something that probably was, "Hell's bells, François, if you're nutty enough to listen to this ignorant foreigner, here goes."

So they threw the net over the other side and Claude sculled the boat around. Then we began to haul in the net and you could see pretty quick that there was a lot of fish in it. And when Claude and François saw that, it was quite plain they had heard the story about Jesus Christ because they dropped the net and began to cross themselves

and bow to me and I had to yell at them pretty harsh or they'd have lost the net and all overboard.

There was ten times as many fish in that one drag as had been in half a dozen drags before. François and Claude then began to jabber and smile at me and bow down and stick out a finger to touch me and François finally reached out and took hold of my hands and his own hands were trembling. He turned my hands over and looked closely at the insides and then it came to me that these Frenchmen were wondering if I was Jesus Christ himself come back to earth and François was looking to see if the scars of nails were in my hands where they nailed him on the cross.

Three more drags on the port side and François and Claude had all the fish they wanted. And by that time the clouds were piling up black on the southwest, out on the Atlantic, and it was certain that one of those rough spring storms was coming with a bone in its teeth.

François got the red sail up and we headed back for Brest with both Frenchmen smiling and smiling at me while we skipped and rolled among the whitecaps. The wind increased and had shifted from about south-southwest to west by

south and this brick smokehouse of a boat didn't ride high on the waves but smashed right through them in a blaze of spray that broke over the bow and soaked the red sail and the Frenchmen and me too.

Minute by minute the blow increased and I, being a steam sailor, didn't have much confidence in this old sailboat. I was sitting back with Claude who was steering with the sweep while François was forward hanging onto the bight of the line that canvas sailors call the sheet.

Pretty soon old Claude began to talk to me seriously and point to the big black clouds piling up behind me. I couldn't tell what he was talking about, but had a good idea that he was asking me to tone the wind down a bit, just taking it for granted that if I could drive all those fish into his net I shouldn't have much trouble choking off a blow.

All I could say was "no compre," and hang on. Green hills were running along far over on our port and when pretty soon I sighted some red roofs and a white lighthouse way over in a little natural harbor, I pointed over that way and said, "Allay," which is French for go over there. I did that because I didn't know just how rough a sea

and wind this smokehouse could weather, and I had an idea that Claude and François were getting to think that I had power to keep their smokehouse afloat in a storm that would sink a battle cruiser.

Anyhow Claude didn't argue. He just hauled over his sweep and yelled at François who pulled the red sail quartering and away we went toward the green hills.

It was just a little village in there, but pretty, and named Coudoyer. The men wore funny little embroidered vests and hats with stiff broad brims and black ribbons hanging down behind and so did the young boys. The women and girls wore lace caps starched stiff and white that stuck out like wings. And everybody wore wooden shoes.

Claude and François tied up their smokehouse to a little wooden dock and I made motions like taking a drink which brought out a perfect broadside of "Oui, oui, oui" out of them. So we walked up the way a piece to a pretty big stone house with a sign "Estaminet" painted on it and went into the cool, dark, stone-floored kitchen and sat down to the big table.

There was an old man and a girl in there and the girl was Jeanne. The old man was her father.

who was smoking a pipe very glumly and probably thinking about all the things he should have done when he was a young man but didn't get around to.

Jeanne, who pronounced her name John, was very beautiful. You could see that even in the dusk of the kitchen. She had yellow hair, but a yellowness that shone like some of the black hair you see on girls in the south of Europe like Spain. Her eyes were dreamy and blue with long black lashes and her skin even on her arms had that silky, satiny feel of a kitten's ear. And, though you see lots of French girls and all kinds of European girls except Swedes that have bad teeth, Jeanne's were as even and smooth as the teeth of a new donkey engine gear and as white as sea salt dried out by the sun. And she wore a waist that was laced in tight showing how beautifully she was constructed and she was so graceful that she seemed to just float up to our table, which, you'll agree, would be quite a job for any girl wearing wooden shoes. When she smiled, the smile glowed clear through me down to my finger tips, like a big shot of hundred-year-old brandy.

Old Claude ordered some wine and when Jeanne went to get the bottle and glasses, Claude

got up and clumped over the stone floor to Papa Le Forgeron, which was his and Jeanne's last name, and began to whisper to him.

Papa Le Forgeron took the pipe out of his mouth and squinted over at François and me and said, "Ah, zut!"

Then old Claude got a little excited and began to talk faster and louder. He pulled his stocking cap off his bald head and waved it, motioning this way and that. Papa Le Forgeron began to get interested. Pretty soon Jeanne came back with the bottle and glasses and Papa called her over, whispering.

Jeanne looked at François and me and says, "Ah, zut!" like her father.

Then her father looked at the bottle on her tray. "Non, non, non," he says, and gabbled and motioned and Jeanne shrugged her shoulders and took the bottle away and by and by came back with another and bigger bottle, very dusty and cobwebby.

"Ah, voilà!" says Claude, twisting his big mustache.

"Ah, voilà!" says François, twisting his mustache too.

"O.K., voilà," I said, but didn't have any mustache to twist.

So Jeanne poured the wine in the three glasses and I was very much impressed with her and I stood up and bowed low to her the way you see gentlemen do in the movies and held the glass to her.

"Have a glass of wine," I said. "You must have a glass of wine. As a matter of fact, I won't drink unless you drink with us."

"Ah, you spik Angliss," she said. "I also spik the Angliss. But I must not drink the van, sir."

"Then I don't drink it, sister," I said.

Jeanne turned to her papa and said something very fast.

"Ah, oui," he said, waving his pipe.

So Jeanne tripped away and I called to her to get a glass for Pop too, which she did and then old Claude stood up with his glass in one hand and his stocking cap in the other and waved his glass at me and spoke and spoke and waved his glass and I said, "O.K., pal, and here's to beaucoup poisson," and they all crossed themselves, even Jeanne, and then we drank up the bottle of wine and got another. It was very fine wine, although I really prefer good beer or even Scotch and soda.

Pretty soon I began to get hungry, so I asked where you could get something to eat, and it appeared that Papa and Jeanne made a business of feeding the public when there was any public to be fed, and Claude sent François to get a good fish out of the boat. There already was a big kettle of onion soup on the stove, so Jeanne poked up the fire and went into the pantry to start dinner. François came back with a big fish by and by and held it up for Papa and Claude to admire and the two old men gabbled and crossed themselves some more.

I couldn't understand what they were talking about and went into the pantry. "No compre French," I said to Jeanne. "I want to talk to somebody I can understand."

She gave me another of those beautiful smiles and pushed over a little stool for me to sit on. "I am ver much honor," she said.

"I am very much honor by you," I said, "and what's the chance of helping you? How about me peeling the spuds?"

"Kiss-ka-dee?" she said, raising her eyebrows very pretty, and meaning what did I say, although I didn't know it then.

"Sure," I says, "and with pleasure." And stepped over and kissed her.

"Ooooh," she said, very much surprised apparently, and blushing. Then she smiled again, showing she had a dimple in each pink cheek, and pointed her finger at me.

"Ah, je conney voo," she said, "I know you. You no Jesus. Oh, ho!"

I told her that as far as I knew for certain she was right, but that there did seem to be some evidence the other way. And I took the pan of potatoes she had and went to peeling them and told her that I was just Harry Patterson from the United States and at present a deck hand on the *Anthony Lundstrom,* but very likely to be about the most important man on earth someday, although she had some trouble in following me.

And Jeanne told me that her mother had died when she was twelve years old and that she had been keeping house for Pop ever since and that the village priest had taught her English and that he was dead now and that she used to have two older brothers but they were both drowned when a fish boat was lost on just such a night as this was turning out to be, and crossed herself.

So I helped Jeanne and we cooked François's

fish and made some French fried potatoes and we had some of the onion soup and the fish and good French bread and butter and some more wine. And we had a very pleasant time at dinner, the Frenchmen all gabbling together and Jeanne and I talking in English, which the others couldn't understand. I kept telling Jeanne what a beautiful girl she was, which she liked more than a little, and don't get the idea that I hadn't ever been around any women and girls yet at this time, because I was about twenty-three years old and had been around the world a lot and learned many things even if not educated yet in the way of books.

After dinner I got Jeanne to walk outside with me to look at the storm and the wind was howling in from the sea, carrying a fine spray that tasted salt clear up at the estaminet and the arm of light from the lighthouse was swinging round and round against the dark sky and the moon was riding high and traveling very fast through the scudding clouds.

Jeanne and I walked up the hill by the lighthouse with the wind fluttering her dress like a flag and her wooden shoes making a hollow clopping sound when she scuffed them against stones. The

surf was booming in black and exploding into white smoke on the rocks and we had to yell when we talked to make any headway against the noise of the sea and the wind.

When we got back to the estaminet the kitchen smelled of French pipe tobacco and hot grease and wine and the three Frenchmen were smoking and playing cards and their deck had a good many more face cards than ours, some of them being named Hector and Samson and things like that. And pretty soon the Frenchmen began to yawn because they get up very early in the morning and Claude and François went to bed in one room and I went to bed in another on top of one big feather bed and a thin feather bed over me for covers.

In the morning the wind had just about blown itself out and Jeanne looked prettier than ever, but not happy. Pretty soon she said to me, "You go away. I never see you again."

I looked at her and knew I didn't want to leave her. I said, "Maybe I won't go away. Maybe I stay here."

She smiled and shook her head. "You joke me," says she.

We were standing in the thick grass beside the

estaminet and Jeanne was wearing a full sort of dress just the color of her eyes and I looked north by east across the rolling hills as green as Ireland with the big live oak trees sprinkled here and there. And pretty soon I stooped down and picked a dandelion out of the grass and it had a thin, solid stem like a violet instead of a big hollow stem. But the dandelion itself was just about the color of Jeanne's hair.

"No," I said, "I'm not joking. I like it here. I like you fine. I've got money for board and I think I'll stay here awhile."

When Claude and François thought the sea had quieted down enough and they got ready to shove off they called me. I looked up in my dictionary the words and said, "Au revoir. Je reste ici," which is French for "Adiós, I'm staying here awhile." But they either couldn't understand my American accent or they couldn't believe their ears, so I finally had to get Jeanne to tell them. When she finally made them understand François burst out laughing all of a sudden, "Ho-oh-oh-oh!" and slapped Claude on the back. But Claude turned on him very fierce, shaking his finger in his face, and all you could understand was "No, no, no, no," until François hung his head.

Jeanne and I went down to see them off and at the dock both of them kissed my hand and then climbed into the smokehouse and shoved off and sculled out and hauled up the red sail and went bowling away over the swells, both of them waving their stocking caps at us on the dock.

Then Jeanne began to giggle. "They still think," she said, "they still think you perhaps Jesus. They not know what I know. I know Jesus never kees girls like you."

This Coudoyer village was quite small with only one more estaminet further up the line and a few stores and houses and a church with a tremendous big crucifix out in the front yard before which all the people would crouch a bit and cross themselves when passing.

There wasn't much to do around there, but I had a fine, lazy time, just working a bit in Le Forgeron's garden, weeding the onions and hoeing the potatoes and helping Jeanne with the chores and serving the customers when there were any. And Jeanne would make these queer French pancakes which smell wonderful when they're cooking and taste better when you're eating them with jelly. And when there was no business of an evening and Papa Le Forgeron could look

after any that came in, Jeanne and I would take walks out on the roads or into the green hills where there were flocks of long-legged sheep, larger than American sheep, but without as much wool.

As I have said, it was springtime and the evening air would be heavy with the smell of big yellowish-red roses growing on dirt hedges. I was very happy. And while I don't believe I really had thought about it, it seemed just natural that one of these days Jeanne and I would go to the church and the padre would marry us and I would stay in Coudoyer all the rest of my life and raise a family and that would be that. For days I hadn't even thought about tremendous things. I hadn't thought about going back to sea. And I didn't know that I was falling into a trap with Jeanne being the bait to lead me on.

Well, about half a mile north of Coudoyer some rich man who used to be a senator or something in Paris lived in the center of about an eighty-acre plantation with a stone wall around it about eight feet high. But when you went up on the hill to the east you could look over the stone wall and see a huge green house with spiked domes like temples in Constantinople, only all of

glass and lots of fine gardens and trees and evergreen hedges trimmed up to look like stagecoaches and horses and evergreen trees cut into camels and elephants and ostriches and things.

One night Jeanne and I went walking up that way in the moonlight, holding hands very happy, and on the other side of the wall where the trees and bushes were thick a nightingale was singing beautifully, very much like a mockingbird only nicer. And the smell of the roses and other flowers was strong in the air even there on the other side of the wall.

We lay down beside the wall in the thick, soft grass and listened to the nightingale, not talking much, and I had my arm around Jeanne and the sweet smell of her yellow hair was mixed with the smell of the flowers. And everything else was quiet except for the bird singing there in the moonlight.

Jeanne crossed her knees and held up one foot so the moon would glitter on her new patent leather shoe that I had bought her. And the moon was white, too, on her round smooth leg because she was not wearing stockings.

Pretty soon she hugged me and said, "Ma cherry tree." That was a joke of hers that has to

be explained. In France, when they like a person they call him or her cherry the way we call them honey. And because all of the men in Coudoyer were short, Jeanne called me a tree.

So I said, "Ma cherry pie."

And she said, "Pretty quick you go away."

And I said, "You want me to go away?"

"No, no, no, no," Jeanne said. "I want you stay forever."

"What for you say I'm going away, then?"

"I know. You think of Amerik. You think about the ships. You think about going strange places. You think about other girls maybe. I see you look and look out at the ocean."

Well, I told her I hadn't been thinking of America and hadn't been thinking at all about going to sea again, which was the truth. And I told her I certainly hadn't been thinking about any other girls because she was the swellest girl I'd ever seen—which was the truth up to that time.

But Jeanne, for her own good, made a mistake in ever bringing those things up. While I hadn't been thinking about anything much but her, she started me thinking.

I laid awake most of that night and I saw how

things stood. I saw that it was going to be a whole lot easier for me to stay there with Jeanne than it would be to go away. I looked ahead and saw myself in twenty years wearing one of those flat-brimmed hats with a ribbon down my back and a smock, clopping around in wooden shoes like the rest of the Frenchmen and sitting in Papa Le Forgeron's corner puffing my pipe at night or playing cards with the neighbors with those Hector and Samson cards. Of course I would be about as happy as anybody because I wouldn't have any troubles to speak of and it would be fine to stay with Jeanne because I thought I was in love with her at the time.

Then the answer came to me. I knew by then why I had been given my brain and my bravery. And I knew then that I was being tempted. If I gave way and allowed myself to be buried happy here in this little Brittany town, it meant that I wasn't strong enough to do the work I had been given. It meant that God would have to start all over with some baby and train him up to manhood and see if he would have enough guts to carry the job through.

So I saw that I couldn't stay with Jeanne in Coudoyer and because I couldn't bear to think

of saying good-bye, I got up in the very early dawn and put on my clothes. I had about twelve hundred francs in my purse, which wouldn't be so much money when transferred into American, but was quite a lot of cash out there on the peninsula. I held out about two hundred francs because I didn't know just when I could get a ship in Brest and rolled the rest up to leave for Jeanne to buy pretties with. I slipped easy into her bedroom and the moon shining through the window showed her asleep under her top feather bed with her goldy hair in braids and with a sort of smile on her face as if she was dreaming something pleasant. There was something on the pillow next to hers, and for a minute I couldn't make it out because it was in the shadow. Then I saw it was that pair of patent leather shoes I had bought her and she had taken to bed like I used to take toys to bed with me when I was about five years old.

She looked so lovely there I wanted to kiss her good-bye—I wanted to the worst way, but I was afraid to. If I ever woke her up I knew everything would be off. I knew I would just stay with her. I knew I would end up something like Limo Cutler in his Vera Cruz cantina.

So I reached over carefully and stuck the thousand francs in one of the patent leather shoes and tiptoed out feeling very tight in the throat. I never felt so bad in my life as when I got out of the estaminet and, knowing I should never see it again, and sat down in the doorway to tie up my shoes and saw the white lighthouse beam turning dim in the morning light. Then I got up and started out on the long walk to Brest without daring to look back to Coudoyer.

NINE

For a number of years before I met Marie and couldn't see sometimes how I ever was going to learn to navigate my brain I would have times of getting discouraged. And then like as not I would think about Jeanne and wonder why I ever left her. Once in a while I would even think about going back to Coudoyer, but I never did. Now of course I know why I left Jeanne and why I never went back.

Like San Juan de Ulloa started me thinking. Jeanne made me think new thoughts. I was tempted to stay there and I was stronger for going away. It was just like any kind of work that makes your muscles hard and strong—that tough job made me harder and stronger inside.

It was the same with the *Chatelaine*. If I ever was doubtful about myself before the *Chatelaine*, that taught me there wasn't any use of being doubtful.

The *Chatelaine* was an awful tub out of Norfolk. When I shipped on her she was loaded with a cargo of secondhand automobiles painted red and yellow and purple and striped to peddle to the spigs in Rio and with sewing machines and bales of cotton goods. And she was quite low in the water even before the trouble.

Captain John Smith was the skipper, and they called him Old Pocahontas in the forecastle. He was both the meanest and the most religious man I ever saw on a ship's bridge.

There was church on Sunday for all hands and prayer meeting on Wednesdays. If he could have proved any of the crew could knit, Captain John Smith would have started a ladies' aid missionary society, I reckon.

It's just the nature of a sailor to complain about the mess no matter whether it's good or not, but it really was terrible on the *Chatelaine*. The galley stove was worn out and the galley doctor was not a cook at all but a Brooklyn bricklayer who had been in woman trouble and wanted to get out of the country.

Probably it was a lie, but Dutch Weiman said he knew for a fact that Pocahontas's boss had bought his supplies for his crews from what had been condemned by the Nicaraguan rebels' quartermaster department. They were having a revolution down in Nicaragua then, so the story sounded good anyhow.

Did you ever see one of those storms that blows up about once or twice a year down in the lower end of the Caribbean? If you have you know what I mean, and if you haven't I couldn't make you understand anyhow. Well, we hit the tail end of one of those hurricanes just south of the Virgin Islands, and I swear that the spray from every other wave broke clear over the top of our smokestack.

Crazy as Old Pocahontas was, he finally had to give up and heave to, or turn her bow dead-on into the wind, which was coming from about due

southwest, and hope to ride her out. But before he did a wave had caught us and swung us around so that the next one slammed us broadside and missed capsizing the old tub by about one point.

Well, we hove to for about thirty-six hours, but drifting by the stern in spite of all the engines could do. Then the *Chatelaine* started to list to port.

I had been thinking everything wasn't right for several hours, but I didn't say anything because you do get to imagining things when you know a ship isn't any too good and I knew that she was leaking and that the pumps had been going even before we struck the storm.

The blow had been letting up a little and the off watch was down in the forecastle trying to win back some of the money I had taken from them. And they weren't doing so badly at it either, because every time I had the dice set for a point the *Chatelaine* would lurch and send the dominoes hoping off under a bunk.

I had the dice and Nova Scotia Red had me faded and Dutch Weiman was betting two bits that I'd come when Red looked up of a sudden and says, "Say, do you know this hooker's listing to port?"

Dutch said he'd thought the same thing, but hadn't said anything about it. And a little wop named John the Baptist looked wild-eyed around the forecastle.

Then Old Man Thompson spoke up. "If you ask me," he said, "I'd say it was a good thing. I'd say it was a good thing for all of us. We're pretty close to being shut of this blow safe enough now, but there's a hell of a lot of knots between here and Rio. And at no time would it be fun steaming this old raft down there. This here list now just means that the leaks is getting worse—probably her plates are sprung. Her cargo has shifted and sprung her plates."

"Where do you make out," somebody asked, "that it's a bargain to sink with the old *Chatelaine?*"

It was a pretty serious situation to us in the forecastle, as you can well imagine, but everybody laughed at this except the little wop. He was past the laughing stage.

"We're not going to sink with her—not if we have any luck at all," said Old Man Thompson, shuffling his false teeth around with his tongue. "Pocahontas will have to turn back to St. Thomas

now. And all the smart ones in the fo'c'sle will have a chance to jump ship in the Virgin Islands."

But Old Man Thompson didn't know Captain John Smith. None of us knew Captain John Smith yet, but we got better acquainted.

The next morning the storm was over, and while the seas were still running plenty heavy and our list was worse, Old Pocahontas called all hands on deck.

The sun was shining bright and sparkling on the big green swells, and I remember looking down at the white, scrubbed boards of the deck with the sunshine glisteny on them and thinking that this light was coming from the sun ninety-three million miles away and thinking that it was the sun which made us walk because it was the strength of the sun in the things we ate that made us move and that it was the strength of the sun stored up in the coal that made the steam that was pushing the *Chatelaine* ahead and thinking that no doubt it was the strength of the sun even that made sailing vessels go because north of the equator the winds regularly are west winds and south of the equator they regularly are east winds. I tell you this just to show that my head is all the time working on such things and

that I don't get my ideas just bang, already worked out, but that I have to do a lot of thinking and figuring.

Well, Pocahontas looked over the crew real solemn and took off his cap.

"Men," he said, "I have called you together so's we can thank the Lord for deliverance from the fury of the elements. Our escape can be credited, I believe, to the prayers of your God-fearing captain, and I think it's fitting that you thank the Lord for your Christian commander and to pledge yourselves to lead more worthy lives. Let us pray."

So Pocahontas started the Lord's Prayer, and when he got to the place that says, "Give us this day our daily bread," somebody in the crew, I think it was Nova Scotia Red, croaked out, "And without maggots!" You see our bread had been full of bugs on the *Chatelaine*.

Old Pocahontas's eyes popped open and his propeller sort of missed a beat, but he went right on with his prayer, and full speed ahead. Generally he ended these prayers like a ferryboat making port, shutting off steam at about "Glory and power" and drifting slow and important

through "forever" and then booming out with his whistle on "Amen."

But this time he plowed on under full power right into the slip, tooted out his "Amen" and opened his eyes and glared at the crew.

"Who was the miserable cur," Pocahontas bellowed, "the dog in man's clothing who dared insult the presence of the Almighty? If he has an ounce of manhood left in his rotten skin, let him step up here now and, on bended knee, ask the Lord's forgiveness."

Well, nobody moved. "I see that the culprit fears to bare his shame," said Captain Smith. "If that's the case I'll recall to you men the story of Jonah. You have a Jonah in your midst. For the safety of your own lives I warn you all to point out the guilty man that punishment from on high may not be visited upon us all."

For a little while everything was so still you could hear the water slap-slapping along the side of the ship when the swells rolled against us. Then Old Man Thompson stepped forward with his cap in his hand. He stood with his legs far apart against the lurch and the list of the ship.

"Sir," said Old Man Thompson, "I've been sailing with canvas and steam for a good many

years, and I ain't ever been accused of insubordination yet. Probably I should ought to be keeping my mouth shut now, but the fo'c'sle is getting mighty uneasy about this ship. She's leaking and she's listing bad and getting worse. I'm not saying anything about the mess, which is plenty bad, Christ knows, sir, but—well, all the seamen aboard this ship knows there ain't a gambler's chance of getting to Rio with her."

Old Pocahontas stood there, sputtering and trying to interrupt, but so dumfounded that he just couldn't get a word out.

"What we want to know," went on Old Man Thompson, very calm and respectful, "is don't you think it's about time to turn back to St. Thomas while the *Chatelaine* is still afloat and in one piece?"

The captain found his tongue then. He spoke low to the first officer and second mate who turned and ran aft while Pocahontas stood there biting his underlip and looking Old Man Thompson up and down.

"Are you the man who broke into the prayer just now?" Pocahontas asked in an even, dangerous voice.

"No," said Old Man Thompson. "I didn't do that, and who it was did it I couldn't say."

Just then the mates came rushing back with four big revolvers. They handed one to Captain Smith who squinted at the chamber to see was it loaded and then cocked the hammer. He stood there with his legs spread, holding the gun down beside his leg while the mates cocked theirs. Pocahontas looked like anything but a prayer meeting leader right then, I can tell you. He scowled and he gestured with his left forefinger, pointing to one after the other of us.

"All right," he said, "if this be mutiny, we'll treat the mutineers according to the law of the sea.

"For the benefit of all of you, I'll say that Captain John Smith is in command of this ship and Captain John Smith don't take orders from the fo'c'sle at any time. It's for me to judge the condition of this ship and I'm competent to judge it without advice from any of you. And I'll inform you also that we're not turning back to the Virgin Islands or any other place. This ship is bound for Rio Janeiro—bound for Rio Janeiro or the bottom of the sea. Is that plain?"

Then he turned to the mates. "Put that man in irons," he said. "Thompson, step aft."

Old Man Thompson moved aft and the mates took him by the arms. As they led him off he turned and grinned. "Good-bye, boys," he said. And he certainly knew what he was talking about when he said it.

"Now for you," Old Pocahontas said, turning back to the crew, "the penalty for insubordination or mutiny on the high seas is death. In case any of you men didn't know that before, you know it now. And I'm here to tell you that Captain John Smith will not be slow to inflict that penalty." He waved his big revolver. "Do you all understand that?"

Everybody apparently understood, so Pocahontas moved aft and the crew went forward, those on watch going on watch and those who weren't on watch straggling toward the forecastle, looking back now and then to the deck which was plainly sloping now.

Down in the forecastle it was pretty hot and close, but the men sort of drifted there just to get together. Micky Callahan looked sad at his bunk on the starboard. "If that list gets much worse," he said, "I won't be able to stay in my

trundle bed. You scuts on the port has all the best of this thing—the more she lists, the more certain you is of not getting rolled out.'

I laughed a little because I had a portside bunk. But when I looked around the forecastle I saw that nobody else was even smiling. Nova Scotia Red was scowling and apparently thinking pretty hard.

"I suppose," Red said, very solemn, "that there is a God—a God what looks after folks that pray to him and all. There must be a God or there wouldn't be all the churches in the world, and besides there's nobody who would say the Bible was a lie.

"I'm beginning to think I've been pretty dumb for not going to church when I'm ashore instead of getting drunk. But maybe if Old Pocahontas does a lot of praying he'll get some help from God and pull through all right. And Pocahontas can't pull through very well without the *Chatelaine* and the *Chatelaine* can't pull through without a crew, so maybe most of us has got a chance, though I don't see how."

"I can see God giving a fine lot of help to a shouting Methodist like Pocahontas," said Micky Callahan. "Let me tell you heathen something. I

got my scapular on that my good old mother give me years ago. And I went to confession not three months ago in Rome—mind you, Rome, where the Holy Father lives. If this old tub drifts into Rio right side up it'll be because God is helping a good Catholic and not the likes of Pocahontas."

You didn't have to do more than to look over the faces in the forecastle to know that every man there was scared. That is, everybody except me. I can tell you truthfully that I was just as calm as I am this minute writing about it.

It wasn't that I thought the *Chatelaine* would get to Rio de Janeiro all right. I didn't think that. I felt certain that Old Pocahontas was plumb crazy and that the mates didn't have guts enough to throw him in irons and take command and go back to St. Thomas. What I mean is that I knew positively that nothing would happen to me, so there wasn't any use of worrying for myself. Of course I liked some of these men in the forecastle and I didn't want to see them die, but there was nothing I could do about it.

You go to a prize fight or a picture show or any place where there is a crowd and you look over the people. You can know that before the week is out some of these people will be dead.

They are bound to be. And maybe the man or woman sitting next to you will be one of them. Maybe the man or woman next to you will be killed by an automobile. But you know you can't do anything about it, and so you don't worry. That's the way it was with me in the forecastle.

For me, I knew I hadn't even started the work God had put me on the earth for. And it just didn't stand to reason that he would have gone to all the trouble of making a man like me and looking after my training for twenty-five years or so and then let me drown on a rotten old freight boat just when I'd almost had enough experience and only needed some book education before I started on the job which will clear up the muddle in the heads of the hundreds of millions of people in the world.

Of course I didn't say anything about all this to these fellows in the forecastle. In the first place, they wouldn't have understood it at all. They didn't see a thing in me except a good seaman who was very lucky with the dice. And in the second place, it wouldn't have made them feel any better for themselves. There is no use of talking about this kind of thing to most people. But of course I told Marie and when I told her

first I could see that it shook her clear to her keel. At that time Marie admitted that I was probably right, but she said I shouldn't say such things—that it sounded immodest. Well, I can't see any reason for being modest about something that is true.

Thomas A. Edison, who invented practically everything that runs by electricity, is dead now. But suppose before he died you had gone up to Mr. Edison and said, "Hello, Mr. Edison, I understand you invented electric lights."

Suppose you did that. Well, Mr. Edison would have said something like, "Yes, I did, and what the hell of it?"

You don't catch a big man like him blushing with modesty and hemming and hawing and finally looking down at his shoes and saying, "Well, now that you ask, there are people who are kind enough to say that I did."

If Thomas A. Edison was going to be ashamed of electric lights, he'd never have sat up all night inventing them. That's the way I look at it. And, well, I have been picked out for a tremendous job, more important than inventing electric lights, and to hell with being ashamed of that, either.

Anyhow, Old Pocahontas got us down in the hold trying to shift cargo so the old tub would straighten up. But if you've ever tried to trim a cargo of secondhand automobiles and sewing machines and baled cotton goods in a leaking and rolling hulk, you know what a time we had. And it was no use anyway. The thing wrong with the *Chatelaine* now was that the shifting had banged her plates loose along the portside and she was leaking much faster than the pumps could bail her out.

In a couple of days the crew was all worn out from the work down in the hold and from worrying about when the whole bottom would give way, sending us to Davy Jones, and the list was getting plainer all the time. Down in the forecastle, even, the oilskins hanging up in the peak of the head weren't hanging straight toward the deck, but were swinging aft and strongly to port, showing that the ship not only was listing more to port, but was also settling by the stern.

About then the men at the wheel were ordered to swing her several points to the starboard, which made us think that Pocahontas was getting scared and pulling in for Trinidad.

There was one of those wild tropical sunsets

that night with the colors running and mixing so fast that it was like somebody tipping over three or four pots of paint on a sloping board. And then about eight o'clock another blow came up from the southwest. It wasn't a big blow, but plenty for us. It came on sudden just as I was coming off dogwatch and caught us by the starboard bow. The *Chatelaine* heeled over on her game side, heeled over far, and from down in the belly of her came a sick rumble. There was a plain jar downward that came up quick like when you miss the last step on a dark companionway.

The *Chatelaine* wheeled a little in her course and shook herself like a dog coming out of a creek. The roar down inside her increased and I knew this was the end.

I thought about my notebook down in my duffel bag and about a pair of real ivory dice and I ran across the sloping deck for the forecastle. As I ducked down the hatch, Dutch Weiman was barging out carrying a little leather grip. I heard somebody, probably Old Pocahontas, come to his senses at last, yelling, "Lower the boats." Then the ship heeled some more in another jerk and the forecastle door slammed. I got my notebook in its oiled silk envelope I kept it in and my dice

in their red morocco case and stuck them in my pocket and then grabbed a jersey because I wasn't wearing anything but an undershirt and canvas pants, it being quite warm.

This didn't take very long, of course, but while I was at it the *Chatelaine* made several more jerks upward as if she was trying to take off like a balloon or airplane, but was tied down. Naturally, I knew the ship wasn't really moving upward. It was just the bow and the forecastle which were going up while the stern was going down.

When I started out the forecastle door had jammed and for just one second I thought I was going to be trapped in there. I lurched on the door again and it was just as if my strength had upset the ship. She heaved violently clear over to port and then we went up in the air as fast as an elevator in a New York skyscraper, and I found myself knocked down from a smash on the head and somehow outside the forecastle hatch, hanging on to the steps.

Then we were going down just as fast and my hold was jerked loose and I was turning over and over and over like a circus acrobat, only I was in the water following the *Chatelaine* down to the

bottom of the sea, and the lights were still burning on her, shining bright in the clear water.

Of course I knew I was being sucked down by the ship, but I didn't think, "Well, here's the end of Harry Patterson," as you'd suppose a man would in that case. I didn't think much of anything except to notice that the lights were still burning although we were God knows how many fathoms down and still going.

Then the lights blinked out and the water roared in my ears even louder and it seemed like I was going up instead of down and I got dizzy and was almost passing out, I guess, when I found myself exploding right into the moonlight, and there I was on the surface of the ocean, treading water and coughing the sea out of my lungs.

Everything was a swirl of foam and suds and bobbing boards and other flotsam. I caught hold of a timber until I found my bearings and when I saw something that looked like a boat I cut loose and swam over to it. The boat was more than half full of water, though, and stove in besides. I hung on to this wrecked boat a little bit and shook the roar out of my ears and pretty soon I heard some excited voices off somewhere, and I pulled myself as high as I could and looked

around. Then I saw another boat about fifty yards off and it seemed that there was somebody in it.

I yelled at them, but when they couldn't make out where I was, I cut loose from the stove-in boat and swam over. They helped haul me into the boat and there were three men there—Dutch Weiman, Nova Scotia Red and John the Baptist.

"How'd you get way over there?" Nova Scotia Red asked me when we got settled.

"Yeah—that was you, wasn't it, Horseshoes, that got bucked out of the boat?"

I didn't know what they were talking about for a minute and then I found out there had been four men in the boat when the *Chatelaine* dived under and their boat had bobbed around so violent that one of the four had been thrown out and lost, but they didn't know who it was because they were so excited they hadn't got around to seeing who was who yet and they thought I was that man.

It seemed that when Old Pocahontas gave orders to lower away the boats the *Chatelaine* already was heeled over so far that it was practically impossible on the starboard side. One boatload of men was smashed that way.

Nova Scotia Red, Dutch, the wop and two or

three other fellows let an empty boat go over the port, which was only a few feet above the water. Then they dived and four of them managed to climb into the boat and row for it to get out of the way of the ship when she plunged. But the *Chatelaine* went down very suddenly.

"This boat jumped and bucked and whirled around so fast," said Dutch, "that you had to hang on for all you were worth to keep from going overboard. Somebody was lost out, but we haven't got an idea in hell who it was. I didn't have an idea in hell who was in the boat with me until things quieted down."

Then I told them what had happened to me and they wouldn't believe it.

"If you went down with her like that," says Red, "what made you come up again?"

"I don't know," I said, "but I did come up and here I am. Maybe the boilers exploded when the sea water hit them. Maybe they blew me up again."

"Why didn't they blow some of the others out too, then?" asked Dutch. "Look at the men that dived over the side like us, but didn't get in the boat. The hooker sucked them down to the bottom with her. Looks like if anybody would get

blowed back it wouldn't be somebody who was stuck in the fo'c'sle hatch."

"Yeah," says Red, "try to think, Horseshoes. You got banged on the head and you must have forgot what you did. You must have dived over with us and you must have been the guy that fell overboard when the boat was jumping so."

Well, I didn't argue with them any more. I suppose it was the boilers blowing up that sent me back to the surface. But why didn't they blow somebody else up? Simply because it wasn't in the nature of things for anybody to get caught the way I was caught and live. But it wasn't the nature of things either for me to drown or die in any way until I have done my work.

But I wasn't safe yet by any means. Here the four of us were, all that was left of the *Chatelaine* crew, bobbing around in a little lifeboat somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean near the tail end of the Caribbean.

TEN

There was a new moon running in and out of the clouds and enough wind to keep the waves spattering over us. I was sitting next to little John the Baptist and he was shivering and mumbling—praying, I suppose, in Italian. And that made me think of Captain John Smith, who was so sure his religion would protect him because he prayed so much. And I thought

about Micky Callahan, who thought his Catholic scapular would keep him from drowning, and both of them gone to the bottom with about thirty others.

But here I was, as I knew I would be, because it was really important that I keep on living. And, religion or no religion, it didn't matter much except to themselves whether Callahan and Pocahontas and the rest of the crew lived or died.

Of course Nova Scotia Red and Dutch Weiman and John the Baptist also were in the boat and safe for the present, but it was likely that I would need somebody to help me get to shore.

Nova Scotia had been fumbling in his pockets and grumbling. "This is a hell of a note," he said. "My cigarette makings and matches is soaked and ruined."

"Well," said Dutch, "I think we all will be worrying about something more than cigarettes pretty soon. I don't know that we've made such a bargain trading the *Chatelaine* for this boat. Likely it will be just a slower death. The emergency supplies all cut loose their moorings and I think they're mostly lost."

I laughed at him. "Look here, Dutchman," I said, "you made a little money betting with me

when I hold the dice. You know I know when to pyramid my bets and I'll give you a tip that this is a time to pyramid. Just stick with me and none of your widows will be collecting insurance for a while."

"You're not holding the dice in this game, Horseshoes," said Red. "But if your luck takes in shipwrecks as well as crap shooting, you better start pulling. We're going to need all you got."

"Shooting craps," I told him, "is just a side line with my luck. My luck never gets down to serious work until I get in a tight fix like this. Matter of fact, I'll bet you ten dollars to five that we all get out of this safe."

"Every one of us? If one of us dies or goes nuts you lose?"

"Going nuts is out of it," I said. "You're nuts now and I'd lose my bet before it started. But I pay if anybody dies."

"O.K.," says Red, "it's a bet."

I knew the bet was safe, because even if I lost I probably would have a chance to get Red into a crap game, if he got out alive, and of course if he was the one to die it wouldn't cost me anything.

We had unshipped the oars again to hold her

so we could ride with the wind and not roll so much, but there was a current here that made it pretty tough unless we rowed all the time. And there didn't seem to be much sense in rowing, except just to have something to do. Every time you stuck an oar into the water it made a spatter of white from the phosphorus, and it sizzled out in little stars like a kid's Fourth of July sparkler. And now and then a fish would go zipping along close to the surface leaving a wake like a rocket. Some of those fish were pretty big and didn't look very good. There's some bad animals in tropic waters.

Well, we hadn't been out more than two or three hours or so when little John the Baptist, who had been sitting all glum and silent, stood up all of a sudden, almost fell overboard when the boat lurched and pointed off to the port stern. "Look!" he yelled. "She's a light. On a ship, I think."

We all looked where he pointed and saw a faint white glimmer on the horizon.

"Naw," said Red. "That's a star—think it's Venus. She ups anchor about this time."

"No, no, no," says John the Baptist. "I been watch her. She's a ship."

Kind of doubtful, we watched for a while, and the light did seem to be moving. Then, all at once, when the boat climbed high on a swell, we caught a flash of red light beneath the white.

"Hot damn!" yelled Nova Scotia. "She's a ship all right, and we're on her port. Where in hell's the moon? Yeah. She's northbound. We got to catch her."

"Think maybe Sparks Waddell had time to send a SOS?" asked Dutch. "Maybe she's coming over to look for us."

"Doubt it," I said. "Pocahontas wouldn't have let him SOS until the last second. Then Sparks wouldn't even have had time to give our position."

But the ship seemed to be coming closer. Every now and then we'd catch a gleam of red light. Red and Dutch and I grabbed oars and started rowing hard for the light while John the Baptist steered.

"If we just had an electric light or something to signal with," grunted Dutch. "That moon don't make enough light for 'em to sight us at more than a thousand yards. Feel around back there, John the Baptist. Maybe the lantern rolled back there during the merry-go-round."

John the Baptist fumbled around in the stern and then let out a yell. "Oh, happy!" he said, holding up something. "Yes, here's a lantern." He shook it by his ear. "And, yes," he went on, "it's got oil in it. Now the ship can see us."

"Yeah," drawled out Red, "wave that dark lantern over your head and see how far they can see it. Fine lot of good that thing is going to do us unless somebody has got matches in a bottle. I just found the boat's match bottle up here and busted to hell."

That was the way things were. Every match in the boat had been soaked, of course, and was ruined. If I had just had time to think and had stuck some matches in the oiled silk envelope I keep my notebook in, but I hadn't had time.

So we went back to rowing, and to make things even worse the moon went behind a cloud and stayed there.

I kept looking over my shoulder at the light. And while I didn't say anything, I could see that if we were far enough to port so we could only see the red port light that all the rowing in the world couldn't get us close enough to the ship so it could sight us in the dark. If she had been head-

ing toward us at all we could have seen the green light on her starboard as well as the red.

We kept rowing, though, just on a chance. I think Red and Dutch felt the same way. While the ship was considerably closer than when we first sighted her, she was still miles away and we would have needed a speedboat to head her off. Red and Dutch were pretty sensible and old sailormen. They must have known what was the situation.

But John the Baptist kept getting more excited, and didn't seem to realize it when the lights began to gain on us and to grow dimmer. He kept leaning forward and staring and staring and finally he did get it through his dumb head that we had lost the race that was almost hopeless from the beginning. Then he began to bawl like a baby.

"She no see us, she no see us!" he blubbered. "She go away and leave us to die in the ocean." Then he mumbled in Italian and gulped and mourned, and when we had quit rowing to rest, for Red and Dutch and I were about rowed out, John the Baptist put his head down in his arms and sobbed for half an hour.

The rest of us kept watching the ship's lights

until we could just see them now and then, and by and by the night began to break and the sky turned gray over in the east. Then it grew silverish and then a streak of pink split through the silver and spread and finally became a bright red.

John the Baptist was sleeping by the time it commenced to get light enough so you could see things. Then the ocean began to paint herself up like an old crib-house woman getting ready for a hard day at the window.

When we would ride to the top of a swell and look across the sea, there was so much color it made you gulp. The eastern side of the swells would be a bright red like the sunrise, and the red would shade down and back to a pink, then all at once break off into a blue. And on the western side of the swells the color would run down into a deep purple. You would see all this for just a moment on top of the swell, and then you would ride down into a blue twilight gloom. The whole thing gave you a funny feeling like drinking absinthe. And the dawn wind was cool and peaceful and fresh.

While I wasn't worried about getting out of this scrape alive, it was plain that we weren't in very good shape, and that likely we were due for

considerable punishment before we got out. It was bound to get pretty hot down there in the middle of the day, and we had only one keg of water. Also neither Dutch Weiman or I had shirts on, I having lost the jersey I picked out of my duffel bag either when I was flip-flopping over and over going down with the *Chatelaine* or when I was being blown back up again, and while both of us were already tanned as much as we could be tanned, the sun down there will burn a man's arms unless he is practically a negro.

There was no telling when we ever would sight another ship, because we most likely were off the shipping lanes. Even if Old Pocahontas hadn't swung the ship off her course trying to hit Trinidad, we were still in a current that was driving west and taking our boat way off the regular lanes to Buenos Aires and Brazil.

We didn't have a very good idea of where we were, but we knew there are a lot of the little Antilles islands through there. And all we could really hope for was to sight one of these islands before our water was gone. But anyhow I myself wasn't worrying. I really wasn't. I knew something would turn up, although I couldn't tell whether it would be ship or island.

It don't waste much time dawning down there in those waters, which are only about fifteen degrees north of the line. And before you could realize it, the sunrise was over and it was broad daylight and beginning to get hot.

We looked each other over. Nova Scotia Red grinned at me and nodded at John the Baptist, who didn't size up so good. His mouth hung open loose and his eyes were as puffy and swollen as if somebody had beaten him up. He was simply scared nuts.

That just goes to show, and I'll give you more proof later on. Dutch and Red didn't look so bad, having only lost one night's sleep and not being cowards hadn't done a great deal of worrying. But John the Baptist was as bad off as a man should be after a week of drifting just because he was afraid of dying and because he let his imagination run loose without a rudder.

I knew that John the Baptist was religious and I couldn't understand quite why he was so afraid.

I edged over to him and I said, "John the Baptist, why be so scared about things? You'll probably get out of this all right. And even if you

don't, you believe in God and heaven, don't you?"

He twitched and then stared at me kind of bewildered. Then he said, "God and Jesus and Mary, Mother of God—yes, I believe. I believe."

"Well, you believe in heaven too, don't you? You believe people who say their prayers and behave themselves go to heaven when they die, don't you?"

"Yes," he said, but not very enthusiastic.

"I don't see why you're worrying then. If you should die this trip, wouldn't it just be a break for you? You'd go to heaven right off and wouldn't have any more trouble—no more scrubbing decks, no more storms, no more lousy mess—everything would be just fine."

John the Baptist shook his head hard. "No, no," he said. "You don't know. I don't know. Maybe I go to hell, I don't know. I just don't know—see?"

"Aw, now," I said, trying to buck him up, "I've seen you praying, and I think you've been a pretty good wop. No use of you being afraid—we've all got to die sometime. You're not scared to meet God and Jesus, are you, John the Baptist?"

He rubbed his hand over his short black hair

and wrinkled up his forehead. "Jesus, no," he said. "But God—" John the Baptist shivered in spite of the morning sun blazing down on us. "I'm scared like hell of God."

"Well, maybe you won't have to fool around with God much," I said. "According to the Bible, Jesus hung around the water front a lot, and it would seem natural that sailors would be on his watch."

Then I asked John the Baptist what I had asked a lot of people before and have asked a lot of people since, including some preachers.

"John," I said, "just what do you think God is like anyhow?"

"Man big as mountain maybe," he said. "Big muscle, long whisker, awful eye. When he talk lightning flash and thunder boom. Unless he have a lot of masses, God catch poor sinner in his big hand and throw him down to hell."

Then John the Baptist stared and stared, not at me, but clear through me and across the sea, like he was seeing his awful God, and then he cringed down in the boat. Then, all of a sudden, he let go a yell and started over the side of the boat. I grabbed him and dragged him back and sat on him.

"What the hell," said Dutch from up by the bow. "If he wants to go, let him. There ain't any too much water in that cask for the three of us—not if we have got to stay out in this skiff for a month or so."

"No," I said, "I won't let him go. I won't let him go while he's got a wad of good cash tied around his neck. Look here."

I pulled open the neck of John the Baptist's shirt and broke the greasy string and took out a leather bag I'd seen him wear there.

John the Baptist started to make a yell.

"Nope," I said, very firm, "you don't take this jack down to the fishes, whether you go or not. If you get to land all right, I'll give you this sack back. If you don't get yourself under control you won't get to land. Then those that do get ashore can use the money. And that's that."

That night when I was taking a nap I woke up hearing a yell and a splash.

"John just went over the side," said Dutch.

"Went over before we could stop him," said Red, sorrowfully, but I had an idea that neither of them tried very hard to hold him. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have put it past Dutch to give

John the Baptist a boost, if it had seemed he needed it.

I wheeled the boat around, but in the darkness we couldn't even sight any bubbles.

There was a hundred and thirty dollars in John's leather sack and a little locket picture of a pretty Italian girl.

Nova Scotia Red and Dutch Weiman were pretty good men to have with you in the sort of fix we were in. They didn't want to die, but they weren't afraid of dying if it finally came to that.

"I don't see what there is to be scared of like the wop," said Red. "Looks to me like we haven't got more than one chance in fifty of getting picked up or getting to land. If we had a chart and a compass and a sail, we might pick up one of the Lesser Antilles under our own power. But we haven't got those things.

"And suppose this is our last cruise. What of it? We got to die sometime anyhow, and why be scared of God? If God made us, he ought to understand us, for Christ's sake. If God made me the way I am, he sure knows what makes the wheels go round in me. Well, I've done a lot of things I hadn't ought to have done. So has Horseshoes. So has Dutch. So has everybody. But the reason

I done those things was because I was made that way. I couldn't help it."

Red grinned. "God, I wish I had a cigarette," he said.

"God, I wish I had a shirt," said Dutch.

"Suppose this here is the end," went on Red. "Suppose in a day or so I'm standing up in front of St. Peter. And suppose St. Peter looks in his book and says to me, 'Cecil,'—that's my first name, Cecil—'what for did you live with that woman, Louise, in Marseilles, and you not married to her? And what for did you leave her bawling after living with her four months?'

"Well, I'll say, 'St. Peter, your honor, it was this way: Sure I knew it wasn't quite right to live with Louise like that, but God made me in such a way that I couldn't help it. Honest, I couldn't help it. I wanted to be with that woman worse than I wanted to do right, and when you want to do something wrong worse than you want to do right, you'll do wrong every time. There wasn't ever a man lived that this wouldn't hold true with. I don't care who he was. If he does the right thing, it just means that he would rather be right than to do the thing he wants to do. With me, you know how it was. I couldn't marry Louise

because she already had a husband. And I left her because I couldn't stand to look at her any more. If God didn't want me to act like that, why, he hadn't ought to have made me like that. He ought to have made me so I would rather do right than to do the things I wanted to do.

" 'That's all there is to it,' I will tell St. Peter, and I'll say, 'If God, knowing all those things, wants to send me down to hell, that's O.K. too. And if that's the case, I want to say right here and now that I'd rather be burning down with the devil than to be in heaven, if that's the way they run things."

Then Dutch Weiman spoke up and said, "I don't believe in any of those things. The whole idea is nuts. I don't believe in any devil or hell. And I don't believe in any heaven or God either. It's just like Santa Claus. When you're a kid you believe in Santa Claus and Jesus. Some people grow up enough so they quit believing in Santa Claus and the Easter rabbit. There's some other people grow up enough so they quit believing in the whole damn nonsense.

"When you die," went on Dutch, "you're dead. That's all there is to it, and a damn fine thing too. The world has been going on for thou-

sands of years with millions of people in it all the time. Look at the millions in China and India right now. Do all those folks go either to heaven or hell? Do they now? Have they been doing it for thousands and thousands of years? Well, where in hell could they put all those thousands of millions in either place? And what good would they be? Go ahead and believe all that crap you want. I'd rather believe in Santa Claus and the Easter rabbit. They're a lot more reasonable.

"When you die, either the fish or the worms eat you. But you don't mind because you can't feel it. When you die you're just the same as a dead fish or a dead bug or a dead tree. And that's plenty fine for me. No more being hungry and sunburned and thirsty and uncomfortable and unhappy. Just the same as sleeping forever. Just the same as never being born."

"If you feel that way about it, aren't you scared to die?" I asked him.

"Scared, hell," said Dutch. "I don't want to die, because I want to see what happens. But I will want to die when I get old and not able to go to sea. And I'd a damn sight rather go out here in the ocean when I'm young and strong than to wither up later. And I ain't worrying none

about my past either. I sure ain't like Red there, worrying how he's going to explain a woman."

"I ain't worrying," said Red. "I ain't worrying a bit. I was just telling you how I felt about it. I was just telling what I'd tell St. Peter."

"St. Peter, phooey," said Dutch. "I killed a man once in Duluth, and I ain't even worrying about that. I did worry some about it for a while for fear the police would slip up on me. But I never did worry about was it right or wrong and what would God and Jesus think because I knew there wasn't anything to that old fairy story. Besides, that son of a bitch needed killing."

So that was the way Red and Dutch thought about things and neither of them afraid to die, if it came right down to dying. And you know how I felt—knowing that there has to be a God because there is too much system to things for there not to be somebody running it all, and knowing, too, that God was arranging things for me and looking after me.

But on the third day it got to be pretty dreary old business floating around in that boat. The wind had died down entirely and it was blistering hot. Just long, greasy, green swells with streaks of purple and copper shifting across them, and

here and there splotches of floating seaweed, yellow as an orange, each piece lifting and falling on the chest of the ocean like the big gold locket on Grandma's breast when she'd gone to sleep on a hot Sunday afternoon still dolled up in the changeable green silk dress she went to church in.

The flying fish would sail up in droves, shining silver in the sun, going skittering above the waves like the flocks of sparrows you see zipping around city gutters. One of these flying fish plopped into the boat and Dutch, who was getting pretty tired of short rations of bully beef, hard bread and rank water, ate the fish raw the way the Japanese and Hawaiians do. Dutch said it was all right, but he kept swallowing and swallowing for a couple of hours like the fish didn't want to stay down.

Outside of talking, which we had about worn out by the third day, there was nothing to do but keep looking across the water, so glisteny that it hurt your eyes, in hopes of sighting smoke, and then resting your eyes by looking at the bottom of the boat where more water sloshed around under the slats.

But I finally got an idea. I divided up John the Baptist's hundred and thirty dollars—forty to

each of us and ten we couldn't split. Red had wool pants on, so I had him take them off and we spread them as smooth as possible over the slats in the bottom of the boat, and I got out my real ivory dice to roll one time each, low man wins, for the extra ten note. I let Red win, knowing that would make him feel lucky so he would start a crap game.

There wasn't room on Red's pants for anything much but the straight five-roll, so I could have taken all the money in an hour if I had wanted to. But that wasn't the idea. I wanted to keep Red and Dutch sort of occupied and keep their minds off the situation. We would shoot as long as Red dared leave his legs bare in the sun and then he would put his pants on again. I would let first Red and then Dutch get ahead and then win the money back, being sure that I had most of it each time when Red's legs began to get too hot. I wanted to have most of that cash in my own pockets because I really couldn't be sure but one of them might go overboard like John the Baptist.

On the fourth day both Dutch and Red were looking pretty tough, what with whiskers and sunburn and all. They weren't feeling very happy

either. What water was left in the keg tasted filthy, and it was easy to see the end of our tinned beef and hardtack. Dutch, that morning, got to looking off in space with an expression that reminded me of John the Baptist. And I thought if he was so willing to die, he might be glad to dodge any more suffering. And thinking that, I had Red get out of his pants so we could roll the bones and me take all of Dutch's money. Of course, if Dutch got to land all right I would see that he didn't starve until he got another ship.

That night we sighted another light—a ship very far away, but it was the same old story, because we couldn't signal her and she didn't have a chance of seeing our boat.

That was discouraging, but still it wasn't discouraging.

"Look here," I said, "we've seen two boats in four days. That means that we can't be so far off ship lanes. And that means all the ships ain't going to be running through here at night. Stands to reason that the next hooker will show up in the daytime and we can lash Red's shirt to an oar and catch her attention."

We had taken to standing kind of a loose and easy line of watches, one man staying awake while

the other two tried to gather a little shut-eye, although we couldn't have it very regular because we couldn't tell time. I had a wrist watch and Red had a big silver Norwegian pocket watch, but both of them were ruined by the sea water and had stopped the first night. The way we worked it, Red, for instance, would take the first watch while Dutch and I sprawled out in the bottom of the boat, and when Red thought he had stood about a two-hour trick, he would wake Dutch up, if Dutch wasn't already awake, and then Dutch would stand two hours as near as he could tell by the stars and wake me up, and so on.

On the fifth day our water ran entirely out. Then it was sure something had to happen within a day or so. Either it had to rain so we could catch some water in our pants and Red's shirt to spill in the little cask, or we had to sight a ship or land. You can't live long in that latitude without drinking water, and we had been going on short rations since the beginning. There should have been more water in the boat in the first place. But of course there may have been more water and rations and been lost out.

That night, the sixth, I woke up very cramped and it seemed I had been asleep for a long time.

I wondered why Dutch hadn't waked me. I sat up and there was Red asleep on the slats. But Dutch was nowhere in sight.

I woke up Red and told him that Dutch must have gone overboard while we were asleep. He groaned and sat up. His voice was pretty hoarse when he spoke. "Guess he was pretty smart at that," he said. "Maybe we better get wise and follow him. We haven't got a chance, not a chance. And the next day or so are going to be the worst hell anybody ever went through."

"No," I told him. "Listen to me, Red. I can't tell you how I know, but I do know. We're going to get a break today or tomorrow."

Of course the reason I knew that was that I knew I couldn't live more than about two more days without water myself and I knew that God would be careful and not carry this experience too far. Just what God's purpose was in this thing I couldn't tell. But I could understand that God would be defeating his own game if he carried the business so far that I died. There would be no system to that at all, and I knew by then that there is system to everything that God does.

Now Nova Scotia Red was feeling pretty sick by this time. If I could have just made him see

things as I saw them it would have made him feel a whole lot better. But I couldn't do that. I knew that without trying, so I had to do something else.

I said, "Red, you know when I'm shooting craps and I'm pyramiding my bets, it isn't very often that I lose, is it?"

Red grunted that I was the luckiest guy he ever saw.

"Well," I said, "I've just got a power of having good hunches. I feel it inside of me when I'm going to make a point and I feel it inside of me when I'm going to crap out. Sometimes I lose when I don't have much of a hunch, but I never lose when the hunch is strong. Right now I've got the strongest hunch in the world that a ship is coming this way. I've got one of the strongest hunches I ever had that we're either going to get picked up today or tomorrow and probably today. If I ever had a hunch like that with the dice I would bet a hundred dollars against a dime and know I wasn't risking the hundred."

I was talking very seriously with Red and could see that it was taking effect. He had a lot of respect for my crap shooting with reason because he'd never heard of a scientist and of course didn't know I was one.

In a way what I was telling Red was a lie. But it's the kind of a lie you've got to tell people who can't understand. You see in the main I was telling the truth, knowing that we were going to be saved.

It was just how I knew it that I was lying about. I think lots of smart people have to lie that way to ignorant people for the ignorant people's own good. I have sometimes wondered if there aren't things like that in the Bible—you know, truths in the main but fixed up different so common people could understand them.

Anyhow my story did make Red feel better and he slept a good deal during the day, groaning a bit in his sleep, while I kept a sharp lookout.

And sure enough, along in the afternoon I sighted smoke to the north and west on the horizon. I woke up Red.

"Here she comes, Nova Scotia," I said. "Get your shirt off and we'll tie it to an oar."

Red was so weak by now that he had trouble getting his shirt off, but I helped him and tied the sleeves to the oar and when the ship got near enough so you could make out she was a ship for certain I began to wave the oar back and forth now and then.

The ship was going to pass us two miles or so to the northeast and Red saw that. He looked at me and shook his head. His eyes were bloodshot and his lips were swollen and black and cracked and stuck out very ugly in the mess of his red whiskers.

"No good," he said when I was resting from waving the oar in the sunshine. His voice was just a sobbing whisper. "Can't make 'em see." He laid down in the bottom of the boat again.

But I kept waving the oar whenever I got rested enough so I could. And pretty soon I could see that the ship was really changing her course. You could see that she was coming straight for us.

I tried to tell Red that, but he wouldn't sit up. He just mumbled something and stayed in the bottom of the boat. I held the oar up, resting the butt in the bottom and steadying it with my knees as I sat on a seat and watched her come on until I could make her out as a single-stacked freighter and when she got close enough so I could read *Horace V. Miller* on her bow she shut off steam and drifted and then put down a boat and the seamen rowed over and took Red and me aboard.

The *Horace V. Miller* was bound from New

Orleans to Rio and had stopped at Tampico, which accounted for her being so far inside.

Red was pretty sick, but I wasn't so bad. That was because I hadn't been worrying. There is nothing like worrying to wear you out, and if you keep calm and confident you can stand a lot in good shape. But of course I didn't have anything to worry about, while Red did have.

ELEVEN

Red was feeling all right by the time we got to Rio and the first night there he and I and three or four men off the *Horace V. Miller* celebrated. After all we had been through together I felt that I ought to spend some of the money I won off Red in showing him a good time.

But the next night I didn't feel much like celebrating. I felt sort of funny. It wasn't that I

had a hang-over so much, but I sort of wanted to get off by myself and look things over and to think. You might say that I should have had plenty of time to think things over while Red and I were drifting. But that was different. It wasn't that I didn't want to spend any more money on Red—it was just that I wanted to get away from people that I knew.

So I fooled around the city in the afternoon, and in a lot of ways Rio is a very pretty town with big Sugar Loaf Mountain up front and all the fine buildings they have there and parks. But it is a very hot city along in October, which is about the beginning of their summertime.

A lot of the sidewalks in Rio are made out of little slick tiles all set in different colors to make pictures like those on a carpet. There are palm trees growing along by these sidewalks and grass and little canals made out of slick white porcelain like bathtubs with nice clean water bubbling along in the canals to irrigate the trees and grass.

In the evening I went to a theater. What the show was I didn't know, and it didn't make any difference because it was in Portugee, which I couldn't understand. There were a lot of folks in fancy clothes running back and forth on the

stage jabbering at each other very excited and sometimes things must have grown quite funny because the audience would whistle and laugh and yell, "Bravo!" But I wouldn't have an idea what was the joke.

So, with it being so hot in there and what with all the garlic-eaters around me, I didn't enjoy the play so much. When the curtain went down on the first act and the audience rushed for the tables in back for a glass of beer or wine, I left the place altogether.

I walked down the street thinking what damn fools American people who have a lot of money are. When you have a lot of money you can stay home and have a very fine time. But instead of that, the first thing a man or woman does when they get hold of a big piece of money is to go traveling. They go places like France and China and Brazil where they can't understand the language and where they don't know a soul and where the food isn't as good as they can get at home and all they can do is to walk around and gawk at things no better or prettier than things in New York or San Francisco or any other American city and usually not one-tenth as good, and get cheated on everything they buy just so they

can go home and brag to somebody about "when I was in this or that country."

So I went up a street to where there was kind of a park looking down on the harbor and a little breeze stirring in the palm trees. I sprawled out on a bench because I was sort of tired and I took off my cap and lit one of those bum Brazil cigarettes that are strong enough to knock your hat off if you haven't already got it off. I just lazied there for a while watching the lights down on the harbor and the gabbling folks walking by on the path when a girl showed up all alone. You could see what she was a block away by the walk of her.

This girl looked at me sideways and then straight. "Hello, Blondy," she said, in English.

"Go drown yourself," I said, not moving on the bench.

"Well, for heaven's sake," said she, stepping up to the bench. "Where did you come from, Yankee—did God send you?"

I took a drag on the cigarette and propped my head up with my hand. "Kind of," I said. "Anyhow, if I wasn't on God's watch I wouldn't be here."

"Well, shoot me for a rabbit," she said, push-

ing my feet off the bench and planking herself down. "My, my, it sure sounds good to hear United States talk again. I was just going to ask you did you want to spend some money, but now that's all off. You come with me, sailor, and I'll buy a drink."

She didn't look any too good to me. And anyhow I wasn't feeling in the woman mood.

"Nope," I said. "I was liking it pretty good right here before you made harbor. And if I want a drink I can buy it. And I ain't looking to buy love and admiration. And if you've got a route to cover tonight, sister, you better shove off because my mamma says to tell you we don't want none."

She looked at me so funny then that I wished I hadn't said it. "Well, Blondy," she said, "you got no license to get tough just because I offered to spend my hard-earned money buying you a drink. If you'd been down here among the spigs as long as I have, you'd know how you feel just to see somebody from the United States—even if it ain't anybody but a long-legged deck swab. Now you can go to hell."

The woman choked up when she said this, as if she was about to break out crying, and when she started to shove off, I felt sorry for her.

"Oh, well, sister," I said, "I didn't mean anything. And if you feel bad about it and can spare the time I'll buy you a drink, and a dinner too. I will if you can show me a place where I can get ham and eggs."

She stopped there under the street light undecided for a moment and then smiled. And that smile was so different from the first one she gave me when she came up the path that she looked almost pretty.

Well, she knew of a place and we went down there together where we got a booth curtained off with a dark-red cloth, and we had a shot of American whisky apiece and then both ate a helping of ham and eggs and French fried potatoes and wine, and it was the best meal I had eaten since the *Chatelaine* left Norfolk on her way to Davy Jones.

I looked her over while we were eating. She was quite thin and looked tired as hell in the eyes, even with the eye winkers glommed up with tarry stuff the way fancy women do. She was wearing a veil that came down to the edge of her nose and her mouth was painted real heavy red until it looked like the water line on a Cunarder. Her hair was very yellow, bobbed off, kinky and stick-

ing out from under the sides of her hat and she was all dressed up in fluffy lace ruffles over her flat chest.

She picked up a piece of ham on her fork and nodded at it. "Takes me back," she said, "to when I was slinging hash in the Harvey House in Newton, Kansas."

"Yeah," I said, "that was before the wicked traveling man came along and done you wrong. It's the same the whole world over; it's the poor what gets the blyme; it's the rich what gets the gryvy; ayen't it orl a bleedin' shyme?"

"Don't be a damn fool," said the chippy. "Let's have some more ham and eggs and some beer this time. And it's on me."

So she called the waiter and ordered an encore with beer, talking in Portugee very well.

"All crap aside," I said, "how did you get down here in Rio?"

She looked at me for a minute and twisted her mouth. "Worst damn mistake I ever made," she said. "I believed a guy knew what he was talking about because it seemed natural enough. You see, I was working in a call house in Omaha. And I'd been in Wichita before that and for a little while in Kansas City. But you were always having a hell

of a lot of trouble with the washed-in-the-blood-of-the-lambers starting cleanups. And you were always having to pay out a lot to some stinking cop who would double-cross you any minute.

"Well, I had been saving up my mad money figuring on going to the coast or maybe to Reno, Nevada, where they have a swell crib district and protected, although I hear there is an awful lot of amateur competition there, and then I had a very nasty fat man who was quite drunk and needing rolling and I just rolled him for three hundred dollars and got away with it. And then I got a neat little dark-complected guy what I took to be a Mexican in the money, but he said he was a Spaniard from Rio de Janeiro. And when he saw I was a natural blonde, he says, 'Honey, you ought to go to Argentine. A blonde like you would get rich down there because all of the women there are dark.' And he told me a lot of things about Rio that sounded swell to me.

"So that very week I bought a ticket to Rio and I didn't know until I got here that Rio is in Brazil and not Argentine at all. And there are lots of German women here just as blond as me, and besides that the men don't seem to go so much for blondes anyway. I should ought to gone to

the west coast, I think now. Or maybe Turkey or one of those harem countries."

I said to her, "For Christ's sake, you wouldn't want to be in a harem, would you?"

And she said, "Why not? You ever been in a harem country?"

"Yes," I told her, "I've been in harem countries, but I've never been in a harem, naturally."

"I don't think a harem would be so bad. Not for me."

"I wouldn't think it would be so good," I said.

"I don't see why not," she said, looking kind of dreamy. "You certainly wouldn't have much to do. And the best thing about it—I've heard when a harem woman gets old she goes on a pension. Do you know anything about that?"

I told her I hadn't ever heard that. "I wouldn't say it was so and I wouldn't say it wasn't so."

"Well," she said, "I've heard they put 'em on pensions when they get old. I've heard that several times and it sounds good. But I never heard it from anybody that I could be certain knew about it. You know how things are—you can hear all kinds of stuff in this business."

She took a drink of beer. "Do you think I

could get in a harem if I went to a harem country?" she asked, smiling kind of wistful and looking for a compliment.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "It would be according to the guy, I suppose. But I've heard they like fat women—the fatter the better."

Then the waiter came and rustled at the red curtains and I bought some more beer.

"Maybe," said the chippy when the waiter had gone, "maybe the reason they have fat, dark women is because they don't have a chance to get slim, blond women. In the movies the desert sheiks are all the time running off with slim, blond girls. They wouldn't put that in the movies all the time if there wasn't something to it, do you think?"

So I told her I didn't think you could tell about that. When you see a ship in the movies, there is a mutiny and a shipwreck almost every time. But I had been to sea for fourteen or fifteen years and the only shipwreck I had seen was the *Chatelaine* and no real mutinies.

"Well," she said, "it might be worth risking anyhow. I got to do something and I'm saving up my pesos trying to get enough ahead to get out of this lousy place. There ain't any future here, I

know. I ain't getting any younger. Of course if I could get back to the States, there's always a chance to settle down if you use your head."

"How do you mean?" I asked her. "You were pretty anxious to get away from the States. That's what you said."

"I wasn't ready to settle down then. But I've never forgot what old Madam Chambers told me in Kansas City. She says, 'Hazel, you're young and can have a good time and save some money if you've got sense. But when you begin to get old, take my advice and don't become a madam. What with the cops and the goats and the rabbits to pay off, it's just plain hell.'

"Then she says, 'You want to settle down before you just have to. You go to some smaller place where there's a railroad division and get a job slinging hash like you did before, only not in a Harvey house. You sling hash in a place where the railroad men eat and if you work it right you can marry some steady fireman or brakeman.'

"I know lots of sporting girls who did just that and got along fine. And I know some what go to towns near army posts and marry army sergeants too. Only that ain't so good. You have to live in the shacks the army gives its married

sergeants to live in, and they don't make much money and the officers' wives stick up their noses at you, which wouldn't be so good. The girls that marry railroad men are lots better off."

Now this chippy girl had had lots of experiences. She had found out a lot about men, and about women too. I looked at her over the top of my beer glass and wondered just what she thought about things.

Finally I asked her. "What," I said, "do you think the reason for everything is?"

She knocked the ashes off the Brazil cigarette I had given her. "What do you mean, the reason?" she said, looking at me sort of hard.

"Well," I said, "you've had a pretty tough time of it, and there must be some reason for the layout. How do you dope it out?"

"O-o-oh," says she. "So you're another of these washed-in-the-blood-of-the-lambers. I'd never guessed it to look at you."

"No," I said, "you got me wrong. I'm not a churcher. You wouldn't understand it if I told you what I am. What I'm getting at is that you've been around considerable and seen a lot of things and probably learned a lot and you must have done some thinking."

"I'm not so dumb," she began.

"I know you're not so dumb. That's why I'm wondering what you think. What's your idea of the world and the human beings and God and the reason for it all?"

"I think it's a lot of crap," said the chippy. "Maybe you're getting at, don't I think I'm going to hell when I die because I don't have just one guy support me, and I say nuts.

"The way I look at it a girl can be a street-walker and still be decent—a whole lot more decent than a lot of these married women what pretend to be so damn nice and then cheat on their men every time they get a good chance, and more decent than these badger game gals what live in fine hotels and sport swell clothes. That's something I never did do—play the badger game. And I never pretend to be anything I ain't. I make my living by being a woman like most women do and I can't see that it should ought to make any difference to God whether one man buys my shoes and beer or a hundred. They pay me money and I give 'em what they pay for."

I was a little bit surprised that a chippy like her even believed in God after the hard time she

must have had. And a little while back she had admitted stealing three hundred dollars from a fat man in the States.

I asked her cold turkey whether she believed in God and what she believed about him. And she started to make some wisecrack and then stopped and thought a bit. "We-ll," she drawled by and by, "most of the time, of course, I don't even stop to think of what I think that way. But I guess I do. Why—what's eatin' on you?"

"I was just kind of wondering——" I began.

"Yeah," says she. "Yeah—just like all the rest of the lousy Yankees back home. Want to reform the poor woman. Want to reform her after she's given you what you want. My God, sometimes I'm glad I ain't back in the States. My God, I think I'll find me a harem country after all instead of getting me a railroad man."

"Oh, hell," I said. "I'm not trying to reform you. I don't give a damn if you hustle yourself around the world both ways from the North Pole. It's none of my business what you do and I'm not trying to make it my business. All I'm wondering is what you think about the world and God. All I'm wondering is how you figure God thinks

you're any good to yourself or to anybody else and lets you keep on living."

The chippy glared at me across the table, mad as hell. "Listen here, you cheap, barnacle-bottomed glory-shouter," says she, "you don't think God ought to let me keep on living, huh? Well, if God keeps any kind of a record you can bet my batting average is a hell of a lot higher than yours, for instance, and I reckon when I finally take a dose of bichloride of mercury that the Almighty will give me a better ticket than some of these folks what think they're going to be led right up to a front seat. My ideas about God are different than your ideas about God, and they're more common sense."

The chippy was getting a little drunk now and was talking the way I wanted her to talk.

"Well, what are your common-sense ideas about God?" I asked her.

"I think God's a woman and not a man," she said, touching off another of my Brazil cigarettes.

I grinned at her.

"That's right," she went on, shaking the cigarette at me. "And why not a woman? These Portugees down here have almost got the right

idea. They pray to the Virgin Mary like she was God and I say a virgin mother is pretty close to being God. Look here, who wrote the Bible anyhow?"

"Oh, a lot of men," I said, "Matthew, Mark, Luke and——"

"Yeah, a lot of men. And of course, being men, they made out God to be a man. But listen: when you was a kid and wanted a square deal, who'd you turn to? You turned to your mother, of course. Mothers give square deals and fathers lick the kids because they do something the fathers don't like. Who makes the dumb laws and hangs folks that don't follow them—that's the men too. Who starts wars and does all the damn fool things in this world and causes all the misery? That's the men. You look at anything good in the world and you'll find that there is a woman back of it. You look at anything bad and you'll see a man behind it."

"You don't like men very well, do you?" I said.

"You're damn well right I don't like men," said the chippy. "And nobody with my experience would either. The way I look at it is that God's a woman and the Devil is a man. God is trying to make the world nice and pleasant, but the man

Devil upsets everything just like it happens in families. I think the biggest mistake God ever made was when she made the Savior a man. That accounts for the world never being saved. Next time we get a Savior, I reckon God has learned her lesson by now and will give us a woman. And it wouldn't be a bad idea to have the Savior be a streetwalker for a couple of years or so just so she could learn what is wrong with men and the world and know what could be done about it."

Now that was a funny idea, wasn't it? And it just goes to show that the average person's ideas are made up by the kind of experiences they have had. It was plain to see that this chippy's mother probably had been good to her and her father hadn't. And she no doubt had been double-crossed by some man or so when she was a kid and had never got acquainted with many high-class gents among her customers.

But with me it had been different. I have known many very fine men and I guess Grandpa was better to me when I was a kid than anybody else. However, I haven't known so many very fine women. Grandma was all right and Jeanne over in Coudoyer was a very swell girl and, of course.

Marie is really wonderful. My experiences haven't been all one-sided, which keeps me from having one-sided ideas like this Rio de Janeiro chippy and a great many other people.

TWELVE

When I was traveling around and got a good opportunity I asked a great many people what they thought God was like and it was surprising that not many had real ideas like John the Baptist in the *Chatelaine* lifeboat and the chippy in Rio.

And one Sunday night a long time after all this I was walking down lower Mission Street in

San Francisco and there was one of these street church bands playing on a corner. You know, the kind of band I mean that goes in strong for trombones, bass drums and tambourines. They didn't make very good music, but they made a lot of it and they had quite a bunch of loafers standing on the sidewalk and street listening to them.

There was an old man who seemed to be the leader and hadn't been playing a trombone or beating a drum, but had just been singing with the music and waving a songbook to keep time. This old man had a big mustache and looked like he used to be a sailor. You know what I mean—you can't just put your finger on this or that, but you generally can tell an old sailor.

Pretty soon the old sailor stopped the music and took off his cap and stepped to the center of the band while the men and women stood there holding their horns and songbooks and drums and he started to talk to the crowd of loafers. He talked about sin and God and heaven and glory and a great many other things in a very earnest but not very definite way. But he, himself, seemed to know mighty well what he was talking about. And I never saw a man who knew the Bible so well,

which is saying quite a bit for every now and then you will find a Bible reader in forecastles.

This street preacher, as I say, was very glib about the Bible, apparently knowing it by heart from cover to cover. Now and then he would say, "As Leviticus says," or "As Joshua says," or "As Nehemiah says," or "As Isaiah says" and then repeat a long string of things from the Bible so fast that it sounded like an anchor chain ripping through the hawse pipe.

While I was listening to him I got an idea. "Nobody," I said to myself, "really knows much about God except what is written in the Bible and the Bible is written in such a way that it is quite hard to understand just what it means unless you put in a great deal of time studying it. And here is an old man who probably has used most of his life studying the Bible. It seems this old man knows as much about the Bible as anybody could know."

Right then the old preacher was shouting out how happy he was, and calling everybody brother and sister very, very earnest, and it was easy to see that he meant all this. It was easy to see that this old man was not a faker. I edged around closer. And afterwhile the band played one more

piece with the old seaman yelling out "Hallelujah!" every now and then. And when they stopped that, I slipped over and spoke to him.

"Captain," I said to him, "some time when you've got a minute or so to spare, I'd like to talk to you."

He put his hand around my shoulder. "Bless you, my son," he said, "that's what I'm here for. Nothing pleases me more than pointing out the ways of righteousness to a young man."

The gang on the sidewalk was sort of closing in to get an earful. "Yeah," I said, "but I'd rather go somewhere else to talk. I want to talk to you in private about God and things like that."

"Oh, my son," said the old man, very solemn, "the word of God should be shouted from the housetops rather than be whispered in seclusion. But come down to our mission and I will talk to you."

So I made a date to see Brother Oliver—that was his name—down at his mission the next afternoon and I went down there and he met me all smiles and bustled around and led me to what he called his study. This was a dark little room all cluttered up with hymnbooks, magazines, news-

papers and cheap little New Testaments and a big blackboard shoved up against the wall.

Brother Oliver set me down in a folding chair and sat down himself in front of his cluttered-up desk and leaned forward and grinned under his big white mustache. "Now?" said Brother Oliver.

"Well," I said, "God and heaven and all are your business and I thought last night that you talked like you knew your business. I'm curious about God and I thought I would ask you about him. I thought I would ask somebody who seemed to know. That's about all there is to it."

Brother Oliver was very pleased. He grinned until his eyes were just little slits and I thought he would look considerable like Santa Claus if he had whiskers as well as the mustache and got the idea he probably played Santa Claus in the mission around Christmastime. He rested a hand on my knee and he leaned forward as if he was going to tell me a secret. "The glory of God passeth understanding," he says.

"Yes, sir," I said, "but what is God like? What's the Bible and all the preachers say he looks like?"

"God is the glory," said Brother Oliver. "God is the divine presence. God is love. What's he look

like? Why, like God, my son. It says in Genesis that man was made in the image of God. So God looks like the sublime figure of a man. If you would see God, why, my son, remember that 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' "

Brother Oliver smiled again and then became serious.

" 'I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord,' " he said solemnly.

Because I was pretty ignorant, this was getting me into deeper water than it should. You see, this was before I had started studying with Marie and I didn't know that Alpha and Omega were Greek for beginning and end themselves. I had known a couple of coal barges named Alpha and Omega and had just taken it for granted that Alpha and Omega meant coal barges and couldn't see what coal barges had to do with the case in hand.

"Do you understand?" asked Brother Oliver.

"No, sir, I don't," I said, "and there's no use of me pretending to understand when I don't or I never will learn anything, and I might as well be honest and tell you I haven't got much of an idea of what you're talking about."

Brother Oliver shook his head in a kind of pitying way and looked around at a half-eaten apple that was laying on a hymnbook on his desk and reached over and turned the apple around so the bites didn't show.

"The Lord is everywhere," said Brother Oliver. "Can you doubt that the Lord who watches the sparrow's fall would fail to watch you?"

"No, sir," I said. "I'm not doubting that. As a matter of fact I know that mighty well. But what I want to ask you is, do you know the reason for everything being covered up so? Is there anything in the Bible about that? Is it a game or something? Did God put everything in the world—the people and everything—and then hide himself and the reason for everything just to make the people 'It' in a hide-and-seek game?"

Brother Oliver had got one end of his white mustache in his mouth and was chewing on it. "No," he said. "It isn't for us poor worldly creatures to know everything. Our minds are finite and we can't comprehend the infinite."

I had heard that line before and had taken it just as a sort of a dodge and told him so.

"No, my son," said Brother Oliver, "you do

not understand. Our minds are of the world and our eyes are of the world and we can't stand to look upon the blinding glory which is God in his heaven. Our poor worldly minds can't understand the wonderful plan of God."

"I could understand it if I could see it and get my hand on it," I said.

Brother Oliver sort of laughed and put his hand on my knee again. "No, my son," he said, "and it would be a sin for you to try."

"I don't get that at all, sir," I said. "I don't get it being a sin to try to understand anything. There's a lot of things that folks didn't use to know about until somebody started digging around and discovered them. Take radio. They could have run radio sets a hundred years ago. Columbus could have had a radio on his ships when he discovered America if he'd just known about it. Was it a sin for that guinea to make a radio the first time?"

"That's different," said Brother Oliver, "altogether different. But the world will soon find out that the radio itself is a sign. Radio and automobiles and airplanes—all of these are signs that the Day of Wrath is not far distant. Look here, my son——"

Brother Oliver picked up a Bible and fluttered the pages and then read singsongy:

" 'And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.'

"See that, he's talking about airplanes—they were given power.

" 'And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war . . . and their faces were as men's faces. . . . And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war.'

"Understand," said Brother Oliver, "this is telling what you'll see just before the end of the world.

"Then here: 'And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps.' See, the voice could be heard far off like thunder, but still it was soft music like a harp. Could he have described the radio any better?"

Brother Oliver wet his thumb and flipped the pages a long way and then found what he was looking for. " 'The book of the vision of Na-

hum,' " he read. " 'The chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the cypress spears are brandished. The chariots rage in the streets; they rush to and fro in the broad ways: the appearance of them is like torches; they run like the lightnings.' "

Brother Oliver shook his head sorrowfully. "Mark that, my son," he said. "Nahum couldn't have pictured the automobile any better if he'd seen 'em. Could he now? 'The chariots rage in the streets; they rush to and fro in the broad ways.' Do you need any better signs than these that the Day of Atonement is close at hand?"

Then Brother Oliver started talking so fast that he stuttered, trying to tell me that now was the time for me to repent my sins before it was too late. He said that the heavens was due to roll up like a scroll almost any day now and this and that and the other, and I wasn't getting any place at all with what I wanted to find out.

Finally when he was practically out of breath I found a chance to break in. "Let's get this thing straight, sir," I said. "Did I understand you to say just now that any person will go to heaven if he just comes up to a preacher and says he believes in Jesus Christ?"

"If a person," said Brother Oliver very firmly, "declares his faith in Jesus Christ, our Blessed Redeemer, repents his sins and is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, his soul is saved."

"That goes for anybody?" I asked.

"Anybody," said Brother Oliver.

"That would go," I asked, "for a very old man who had done everything wrong all his life and then repented just before he died? That would go for crimps, pimps and loan sharks?"

"Yes," said Brother Oliver. "Though their sins be as scarlet, if they live a godly life after being washed in the blood of the Lamb."

"Now, listen, sir," I went on. "I don't know if I understand you correctly. Take some good person. Take some good person who never did anything particularly wrong in his life. Would he go right down to hell when he died just because he hadn't been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Is that it?"

"Yes, that is so," said Brother Oliver, very solemn. "My heart bleeds for my poor benighted brethren and sisters who have not found God, and who face eternal torment unknowingly. That, my son, is why I go upon the highways and byways

and shout the word of God that those who have ears may hear in spite of themselves, that they may hear and be saved."

Brother Oliver was very serious. He meant what he said as much as any man I ever saw in my life. But I was disappointed in him. I could see now that he didn't know his business the way I hoped he did.

His talk about heaven and hell was the rankest kind of nonsense. I have pointed out to you how much system and good sense there is shown in the way the winds blow and the way things move from left to right north of the equator and from right to left south of the equator.

Think of the way the seasons of spring and summer and fall and winter work around. Think of the ocean tides. Think of the sky full of stars and suns and planets and comets and of God back there navigating the whole affair for thousands and thousands of years without a collision to speak of. When you think of that and see how logical and full of system everything is, you can see that it took a mighty logical and sensible God to build it all and to keep it running. Isn't that so?

Well, then, how could anybody believe that a

God with enough sense and system for all that would run such a silly and senseless heaven-and-hell game like Brother Oliver said?

It just didn't stand up. Brother Oliver had very little more sense about his own business than the ignorant wop, John the Baptist. He had little more sense about his own business than Dutch Weiman who didn't believe in God or anything. And I honestly think Nova Scotia Red and the chippy Hazel down in Rio were more sensible, even if they probably didn't know a thing of what they were talking about.

Now, just look at what Brother Oliver was claiming. According to his notion, this Hazel or any of them like her could raise hell and roll drunks for their money until they got so old and ugly that they couldn't do anything but be scrub women for a living. Then they could go to a preacher and say, "I've been wicked, but I won't be wicked any more and I believe in Jesus Christ."

And the preacher would say, "Bless you, my sister, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," and sprinkle some water on her head and she's got her ticket for heaven right there.

And then, according to Brother Oliver, you can take another girl—a real good girl like Marie —who never did anything wrong in her life, but is all the time doing something to help somebody else, and she walks through the rain to take something to some poor person who is sick, and the good girl gets pneumonia herself and dies without ever telling a preacher that she believes in Christ and being baptized, and it's just too bad for her. She is shanghaied right down to the hottest corner of hell.

If God had no more system than Brother Oliver said, the Milky Way would have got wrapped around the moon and the sun's boilers would have blown up and the earth and Mars and Venus would have lost their rudders and gone rolling in the trough like three dice in a tin cup thousands of years before he got around to making Adam out of a handful of mud.

Anybody who has been around and noticed things can't help but know that God is so wise and full of common sense and accurate that it makes you a little dizzy to think what a job of navigation he is doing with never a mistake. So it seems to me to be almost an insult to God to

say he is dumb enough to run a heaven-hell game like Brother Oliver claimed.

I had intended to tell him about my plans to cross the Black Ocean to find the secret of everything. I thought that, being a preacher and well-read in the Bible, he might give me some help. But after all this talk I knew it was no use. Then I knew he probably wouldn't understand what I was talking about.

But Brother Oliver went on talking. "My son," he said, "don't you know that Jesus loves you? Won't you profess Jesus Christ and be saved before it's too late? Remember my proof that the Day of Wrath is at hand."

He was very serious in this and honestly wanted to keep me from going to hell. It wouldn't have cost me anything to tell him yes and it would have made him feel good. But I knew I would feel like a faker deep down in myself, so I just said, "Sorry, sir, but I don't feel that way and I know you wouldn't want me to pretend."

When I said that Brother Oliver looked sad and shook his head. So, because I had a couple of hundred dollars I had made rolling dice on a smooth blanket, I gave him a five-spot to buy

doughnuts for poor bums and that cheered Brother Oliver up quite a bit. He blessed me as much, I think, as if I'd let him baptize me and save my soul.

THIRTEEN

I have mentioned Marie a number of times already, but I haven't told you much about her.

It was on the trip to Frisco when I had the talk with Brother Oliver that I first met Marie, only Marie is all the time telling me not to call the city Frisco, but San Francisco. Natives of San Francisco are quite particular about that.

Well, I was wandering up by the Civic Center when I noticed the big Public Library. I had seen public libraries a lot before and even bigger ones in New York and places, but I really hadn't thought much about them.

Now don't get the idea that I never read, because I did. In the forecastle you will often find men who do lots of reading, taking many books to sea with them. I often would borrow a book when one of these readers would say I would like it and especially if the book had some information in it and wasn't just a story. And I had bought quite a few books too, like this Spinoza, and had bought a dictionary to look up words that I didn't know the meaning of.

You see, I wasn't entirely ignorant, but still I lacked a hell of a lot of even starting to be educated.

So here I was looking at this stone building, much larger than a warehouse. And all of a sudden I stopped stock-still with the thought that this tremendous big building was full of nothing but books. Thousands—hundreds of thousands—of books in there. Most of the smart men that had lived for centuries had written down the things

they had studied out and these things had been printed in books.

The thought of it made me gasp like falling into cold water.

Everything I wanted to know to train myself for the voyage across the Black Ocean no doubt was right in that stone building. Of course maybe most of the books in that library were storybooks and no real good to a grown man, but still there might be a hundred books that would teach a man how to think right. It was amazing. I couldn't understand why I hadn't thought of public libraries before, because I knew about them and knew that anybody could go in and read.

The nearest thing like this with me standing on the sidewalk looking at the building is when you've been in a storm or something and all tired out, and you flop asleep in your bunk, and in about ten minutes something happens and you get called out again, why, you find yourself out on deck still half asleep not knowing just how you got out there. Just like that I found myself walking into the San Francisco Public Library.

I sort of wandered around a bit in a hallway and then into a big room where Marie and some other girls were working, although I didn't know

she was Marie then. But I saw Marie there at the desk and I took off my cap and walked up to her and said, "Good afternoon, miss, I would like to read some of your good books."

Marie is pretty small with black hair quite neat and not bobbed and wears big black-rimmed glasses. She looked up at me sort of surprised and then smiled very nice. Some men possibly might not say Marie is pretty. But anyone would say that she looks smart and sensible and when you get to know her she looks a lot better to you than these fancy broads, if you understand what I mean.

Well, Marie looked up at me and smiled, making me feel very friendly toward her, and she said, "Yes, indeed, and what kind of books do you want to read?"

"Some books on information," I said, being dumb yet about books and not knowing how to tell her what I wanted. And when she seemed to be waiting for me to go on I tried to explain.

"You see," I said, "I want to read some books that will show me how to navigate my brain."

"Oh, I see," Marie said, "you're a sailor."

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

So she went to a big cabinet full of little tin

drawers and pulled one of the drawers out and looked at some little cards that were standing on edge there and wrote something down on a slip of paper. Then she came back to me and smiled again and told me to come with her and I followed her with her little heels click-clicking on the floor to a place where there were rows and rows of shelves packed full of more books than I ever imagined and she looked along until she came to a particular shelf of books, some big and some little.

"I think you'll find what you want here," she said, "and you can read over at that table," and then went back to her desk.

Well, I pulled out one of those books just at random and sat down to the table. But it didn't take me long to find out that this book wasn't what I wanted. It was made up just of a lot of figures on navigating a ship.

So I put that book back on the shelf and took another and bigger book and found it was about navigating ships too. And every last book on that shelf was the same way—just about navigation.

I went on back to the girl (who finally turned out to be Marie) and I said to her, "I guess you

didn't understand what I wanted. Those books, every one, is just about ship navigation."

"Why—yes," she said, "didn't you——"

"No, miss," I said, "you got me wrong, I guess. What I wanted to find out wasn't about navigating ships, but about navigating me."

Marie sort of opened her eyes wide at that. "Oh, yes," she said. "Let me see——" And she tapped her little chin with her lead pencil.

Then she went to the little rack of tin drawers again and afterwhile she found what she was looking for. Then she called a boy and gave him a slip of paper and the boy came back by and by with a green book written by a man named Watson about why people behave themselves or don't behave themselves as the case may be.

Well, I sat down at a table and read this book for a couple of hours, but couldn't make much out of it. I don't think this Watson has been around very much. So I finally took the book back to the desk, but the girl who turned out to be Marie had gone home.

The next day I got a haircut and shave and shoeshine and a new double-breasted gray suit and a new gray hat and a fancy two-dollar necktie and dressed up like a gentleman with a hand-

kerchief sticking out of my upper coat pocket and went back to the library.

For just a minute Marie didn't recognize me because on the day before I was just wearing a jersey and pants and a cap. But when she saw who I was she smiled friendly and said, "How do you do. Did you find what you wanted yesterday?"

"No, ma'am," I said. "I really didn't. You see it's this way—maybe I seem mighty dumb to you, but I'm not really dumb. I just haven't got much book education. I've got a strong brain, but I don't believe I have learned the tricks of using it. On some things I can think much better than the average right now, but when I get on other things, I know I could do a lot better if I knew the tricks to help me over the shoals.

"I don't know whether I can make you understand what I mean exactly or not. That's one of my main troubles—making folks understand just what I mean. Do you see what kind of charts I want to find?"

"W-e-l-l," Marie began, kind of doubtfully.

So I started over again. "Right now," I said, "I do my thinking kind of by main strength and awkwardness. And I know you can't do anything very well by that system. I want to find out the

tricks to thinking, see? You've seen a man playing a piano, I know, and you can see that he couldn't do anything much unless he had learned the tricks. There are tricks to everything. Back home in Arkansas I've seen men cutting down trees and throwing them within a foot of where they want the tree to fall. There are real tricks in chopping down a tree."

"I suppose that's true," Marie said.

"There are tricks to holding a ship on its course too," I told her, "especially in bad weather. There are more tricks to shooting craps than most people realize. There are even tricks to hammering the rust off an anchor chain."

Marie nodded her head very ladylike.

"I know those things pretty well," I went on, "but you see that fellow over there?" I pointed to a skinny, pale young fellow wearing glasses and sitting at one of the tables reading a book. "Now that gent probably wouldn't know the tricks I know. He probably wouldn't know any of the tricks of fighting or steamshipping. But just the same he probably knows a lot of tricks I don't know. He probably has got a lot of school education and has learned the tricks of thinking."

Marie was smiling up at me, very interested,

and I noticed how white and even her teeth were.

"I reckon," I said, "that it's like handling a barrel of oil. The strongest man in the world is going to have a lot of trouble with a barrel of oil unless he knows just how to use his strength. You see, you've got to get the oil sloshing just right inside the barrel and then you take advantage of the sloshes and make them help you instead of hindering you. Then you can spin a barrel of oil right along even if you've not got any more muscle than the average seaman.

"With me, when I'm thinking things out, I can worry along by main strength and awkwardness, like I told you. But I don't have the oil sloshing right to help me over the bumps. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand what you mean," said Marie, looking quite serious. "Did you ever think of going to night school?"

I had heard some of night schools, but had the idea they just taught you how to be a clerk in an office and I told her so. But she told me that wasn't entirely true. She told me how a person who never did get a chance to go to regular school much can go nights to school after he is grown

up and learn things while he's working days on a job.

"That's all right," I told her, "but I don't see how it's going to help me. I'm signed up to shove off Thursday on the *Paul Golden* for Karlskrona and I can't go to night school when I'm on a ship."

"Well, that's too bad," Marie said, like she meant it. "But you're smart and you can teach yourself a lot of things. Why don't you buy an English grammar and a little dictionary and two or three good books to read? Then you can study and read during your spare time on the voyage."

I told her that I already had a dictionary and did considerable reading and told her about Spinoza.

Marie shook her head. "You need somebody to direct your reading," she said. "It's a wonder you haven't lost your desire for knowledge after an experience like that. Spinoza is just for advanced students and shouldn't be taken too seriously at any time. But I'm glad you have been forming the dictionary habit. That is quite a start right there."

Then she asked me had I ever read *Silas*

Marner by George Eliot and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens and I told her I hadn't.

"They would be a couple of good books to take along with you on your voyage," Marie said. "And when you come to a word that you don't understand fully, look it up in your dictionary and then notice particularly how the author used it.

"If you stop and do this each time you come to a strange word you'll be surprised how quickly you improve your vocabulary. Use the word yourself then. Use a word three times and it's yours."

I didn't tell Marie at that time, but she certainly made me see how little I knew. Maybe it will be hard for you to believe after reading what I have written so far, but I didn't even know what vocabulary meant then.

So she told me to study a page every day in the grammar book I was going to get and she wrote down the names of *Silas Marner* and *David Copperfield* for me so I could buy them and I thanked her a lot for her kindness to me.

Then I said, "Miss, if you would tell me your name I would like to send you a postcard from Sweden and the Panama Canal to tell you how I'm getting along."

Marie looked funny for a moment and then smiled. "That would be lovely," she said. "My name is Marie Snyder. You can address me here at the library."

So I thanked her again and bowed to her like a gentleman and she wished me a happy voyage and I went out.

I followed out what Marie told me by going right down to a bookstore and buying the books, and I read them on the *Paul Golden* too. It is very important what I learned by reading on that voyage to Sweden, but there were some other important things besides reading. They had to do with a sailor named Gus Schwartz.

Gus was quite old and carried his false teeth in his pocket except at mess and he had a long nose which seemed longer because his mouth had collapsed in like a pair of dungarees when the legs are taken out of them.

Because he was on the other watch I didn't notice Gus until we were rolling down off Lower California. Then one day I was laying in the shade of a boat reading the *David Copperfield* book and Gus came along biting his lips with his gums and making his face crease this way and that

way with wrinkles. He looked at me and then spat into the wind.

"Reading a storybook?" he asked me.

If he hadn't been an old man I would have told him I was flying a kite or hoeing the garden or something, but you don't like to smart crack at an old man who's probably having a tough time and just trying to be friendly. So I said, yes, I was reading a storybook.

"Just wasting your time," says Gus, spitting into the wind again.

"Oh, I don't know," I says. "You can learn a lot out of some storybooks."

"Huh," says Gus, "if you want knowledge you should ought to learn how to read the Book of Life."

"I've read at the Bible some," I told him, "but not all because the begats make me pretty tired."

"Aw, I don't mean the Bible," says Gus. "The Book of Life is the sky and the sea. The story of the world and the stars and everything is in the Book of Life for them that can read." Then he sighed. "But there ain't been many," he went on, "who ever learned to read."

"Can you read it?" I asked him, getting interested.

He nodded his head, very sad, it seemed to me. "Probably more than any man since Khufu. You know Khufu?"

"Don't recall him," I said.

"Ever been in Egypt?"

"Touched in Port Said and Alexandria is all. Did Khufu come from down that way?"

Gus wrinkled up in a grin. "Even reading books, did you read the right ones, you'd know better. Khufu come from down Memphis way and I don't mean Arkansas."

"You may know," I says, "about Khufu, but Memphis is in Tennessee and not Arkansas."

"Not this Memphis," says Gus, "and Khufu lived thousands of years ago and an Egyptian in Memphis told me about him before you ever was born. Khufu learned to read the Book of Life and he learned his brightest son to read it. He never wrote down the tricks but only told this boy and told him to tell his brightest son and it went that way for hundreds of years until one of the Khufus only had one son and him a idiot that couldn't be learned much and so the trick died with him."

"How then," I asks Gus, "did you learn it or maybe you're the idiot son?"

"Bastard," says Gus and spits into the wind.

He started to walk away sore but I called him back. You see, I was interested in what the old coot had to say even if I didn't believe him much.

"Come on," I coaxed him, "tell me how you learned how to read the sky and the sea."

"Khufu didn't read the sea," he said, grumpy. "He read the sky and the sands. I learned the same way he did, by studying and noticing the changes and watching what came after each change. Khufu had it easier than me because he had his pyramid with the telescope running up the center—best damn telescope ever built, ten times better than the one they got down by Los Angeles."

"I didn't know about that," I said.

"Lots of things you don't know about and never will sticking your nose in a book by some man that put in his time learning how to write books instead of learning about the world."

"Well, look," I said, very anxious, "tell me what you learned from the stars."

"I learn anything I want," said Gus. "I learn about you if I want, which I don't."

By this time I had crawled out from under the boat and was standing up by the little old fellow.

"Come on," I urged him, "let me see you tell

me something about me that you can get from the sky and the sea."

For a minute he looked at me with his round, pale eyes and dignified as a preacher. Then he nodded his head.

"All right," he says, "when's your birthday?"

"June third," I said.

Then Gus closed his eyes and wrinkled up his face even more than ever and took hold of my wrist with fingers that were as hard and crooked as roots.

"You're a Gemini," he says. "You were born under the sign of Gemini, the twins. All your life you'll have one idea and then another. You are under Uranus. I see you traveling a lot, going from place to place."

"You don't have to look at the stars to see me traveling a lot."

Gus didn't notice me. "You don't care so much for money as for some other things, such as like being free," he says. "Is that right?"

"More or less," I admitted.

"But Venus ran across Uranus's bows ten days ago what would place you in Frisco. You met a woman there, didn't you?"

"Sure," I said, thinking of Marie.

"Well," he says, winking one eye at me, "you want to look out for that woman. She sort of knocked your plates loose, didn't she?"

"You ain't looking at the sky," I objected. "You're just looking at me and guessing."

"I shut my eyes first and remembered the sky as she was last night," Gus said, very emphatic. "I know what I'm talking about. You don't look out and that woman'll marry you and make a grocery clerk out of you."

I remember that very plain because it was a strange thing for him to say. But it didn't impress me much right at the time because it was more or less the same old bilge you expect gypsy fortunetellers to hand out for the price of a shot of gin.

"That's all right," I told Gus, "but tell me what you and old Khufu learned from reading the sky and the sea."

"I don't know," says Gus, "that Khufu learned exactly the same thing that I did because people read things different. But he must have been a smart man too, and what I see must have been there for him to see."

Gus looked at me fiercely and tapped me on the chest with his finger.

"You seen jellyfish, ain't you?" he asked.

"Yes, I've seen jellyfish. I've stepped on 'em barefoot too," I said.

"You know how they have young jellyfish?"

"No," I said, "I never stopped to think much about jellyfish having young. Reckon they lay eggs, don't they?"

Gus waved his arms very disgusted. "Stick your nose in a book writ by a man who don't know any more even than you do. Won't look at the Book of Life," he said.

"Well, how do jellyfish have babies?" I asked him. "Do the storks bring them maybe?"

"Hell," said Gus, "jellyfish don't have babies."

"All right," said I. "Now that's settled, what did you learn from the sky and the sea?"

"Jellyfish," he went on, "when they get to feeling lonesome or something just split in two. Then the two parts grow up again. That's the way jellyfish do."

I didn't see where he was getting. So I says, "But ever since Eve picked the apple human folks haven't been able to do that way. Ever since Eve picked the apple there's been sin in the world and men eat bread in the sweat of their brow."

Gus twisted his mouth and spat over the rail.

"Do you want to know or don't you want to know?" he demanded of me.

"Sure," I said, "of course I want to know."

"All right," says Gus, "the sun's a jellyfish."

I squinted up at the blazing Mexico sun. "It don't look it," I said, "but go ahead."

"The sun's a jellyfish," he insisted, "in principle. It's the old mother jellyfish and was just the same thousands of years before Khufu was born. Us human beings can't measure time. We don't live but a minute compared to time just like some gnats that live a couple of days don't live long compared to us.

"Every now and then the old mother jellyfish splits up into two jellyfishes. She's been doing that for several of her years which is thousands and thousands of our years and millions and millions of a gnat's years. The sky is full of her pups what we call stars, and this here earth is one of 'em too."

"Can you prove that?" I asked him.

"A smart man," he says, "don't need proof for a thing like that. He can see for his own self when it's pointed out to him. There's probably hundreds of other mother jellyfish like the sun way off in the sea-sky so far we can't see 'em, but when

it's clear at night we can see thousands of our sister pups and never notice if some of them split up, but I know there's more of what you call stars than there was when I was a young man."

"Never seen the sun split up, have you?" I asked.

"No," he says, "but I expect to see the earth split up again."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "You trying to tell me you've seen the earth split up once?"

"I don't mean to tell you nothing of the kind," Gus says. "But if it hasn't split up once, where you think the moon come from?"

"Couldn't it come from the old mother jellyfish like the rest?"

"No, it couldn't. It hangs too close to the earth. It shows mighty plain by its actions where it come from—just like a calf whale hanging around the old cow. And if you had eyes to see, it'd be plain to you that the earth is fixing to split again. Ever notice how different the Asia part of the world is from the rest?"

Well, of course I had noticed that China and India and all are quite different, that Europe and

America are much more alike than Asia and any other place.

"Ever notice," he went on, "how many earthquakes they're having lately in Asia places and Japan and along the South America west coast?"

And of course I'd noticed that.

"There you are," said Gus quite positive. "That's where she's trying to split and where she will split before long. The Asia part is a new jellyfish right now, only attached like a Siamese twin. Pretty soon there'll be a hell of an earthquake that'll kill millions along the line and when the folks that ain't killed get their bearings they'll find another world bumping along in the wake. That's one of the reasons I don't like to sail the Pacific. I'll feel at lot easier when we get into the Atlantic."

But Gus didn't have any reason to feel easier when we got into the Atlantic.

The *Paul Golden* was cut quite low aft between the superstructure and the high poop deck. And, when we were running quartering to a sudden gale that came up one day out of Colón, every other sea was breaking over the deck.

Because the gale came on so unexpected we had quite a tough time battening down the

hatches and old Gus, not being so active as a young man, got caught by a sea and thrown so hard into a hatch that it broke his left leg just below the knee.

Little freighters like the *Paul Golden* don't have doctors, but Captain Quaintance, the skipper, poured half a pint of whisky down old Gus and did a handy job of setting the bone and splinting up his leg.

This Captain Quaintance was a fine man and moved Gus from the forecastle back to a spare bunk in his own cabin where he'd be more comfortable. The next night when the blow was over I went in and sat with Gus for a while and asked him what he'd learned about people from his "book."

Gus was pretty cheerful and his leg wasn't hurting so much. "People," he says, "are lice. Sharks are lice. So are cows and lions and birds and trees. They all live off the jellyfish Earth. And lice ain't important, once you get used to them."

"What," I asked him, "do you think of God and heaven? Do you think you'll go to heaven when you die?"

"Why should a louse go to heaven?" Gus

grunted. "Maybe when the mother jellyfish dies it'll go to heaven. I wouldn't know about that."

The next morning Gus was dead. It was very strange to see a man die from a broken leg so easy just when he seemed to be getting along all right. This Captain Quaintance radioed a doctor in Miami and the doctor said maybe he'd been injured internally or maybe he had a bad heart or maybe there was a blood clot. We never did find out because we buried Gus at sea.

But the important thing about Gus is this: He had a good head on him. He did a lot of thinking, but he didn't know how to think because he never learned by education how to make his thoughts follow a course. It made me see very plain how necessary it is for me to get proper education or else I may never be able to think my way across the Black Ocean. Otherwise when I am old I may get swung off on some silly notion like Gus's jellyfish that any educated man could see was nonsense.

As I was saying, I read *Silas Marner* and *David Copperfield* and looked up words I didn't know in the dictionary. That way I must have learned a couple of hundred words I didn't know before. More than that, I learned something about put-

ting ordinary words together so they sound impressive and make what you want to say seem more important.

You take when David Copperfield wanted to say he felt bad about leaving Little Emily, he would say, "My agony of mind at leaving little Emily was piercing." That sounds very fine indeed from David Copperfield, who was a polished gentleman, and probably this book would be a great deal better if I could write that instead of just saying that I felt bad because it would be six weeks or two months before I ever saw Marie in the library again.

If I did cut loose and write down, "My agony of mind at leaving Marie was piercing" like Mr. Dickens, you probably would say, "What the hell —that sailor is full of crap," and wouldn't believe anything I said because you don't expect me to be polished, but only honest.

I tried hard for a while to study the grammar book too, but finally gave it up. I couldn't see where it was getting me any place and it seemed a waste of time going through all the rigmarole. I couldn't see this business of taking every word in the world and tagging it as a noun or a verb or adjective or preposition or something. If they

stayed that way after you had them tagged, it might be different. But there wasn't even any way of keeping these words from switching around without giving notice and balling you up.

In spite of everything Marie has said, convincing me in part, I still don't see the sense of a lot of grammar. Take a little sentence such as, "The man caught a black fish." All right, "black" is an adjective there. But you say, "John Black blacked Bill Murphy's eye," and you've two "blacks" in one sentence and neither one of them an adjective. "Black" is a noun because it's John's name and it's a verb because it tells what he did to Murphy's eye. Up above "man" is a noun, but if you say, "a crew of thirty manned the ship," "manned" is a verb. And up above "fish" is a noun, but if you say, "The man went out to fish," it's a verb because it tells what he went out to do; and if you say, "He told a fish story," "fish" is an adjective because it shows what kind of a story he told. If that isn't a mess, I don't want to get in a mess.

FOURTEEN

When we finally got back to San Francisco and were paid off I got a haircut and shave and dressed up and hurried to the library to see Marie.

I could picture her sitting at her desk, so neat and small and honest-looking and picture her big brown eyes lighting up when she would see me saunter in the door with my hat in one hand and

my new topcoat over the other arm. And I had a fine plan all worked out in my head too.

But it turned out different. She didn't even see me coming in. There was a mob of people, women, kids, pale-looking men and all in front of her desk and Marie, very calm and sweet still, was busier than a Coney Island ferryboat on the Fourth of July. She was sending little boys chasing after books with slips of paper and taking other books from other little boys, flipping open the back covers, pulling out pieces of cardboard from the book pockets, writing down the numbers of the people's dirty-looking library cards on the cardboards and stamping the date in red ink with a rubber stamp that was fastened to the stern of her leadpencil, stamping the date on the library card, sticking the library card back into the pocket where the narrow cardboard had been, standing the cardboard up in a slot of a wooden box, closing the book, smiling and handing the book to the man or woman or kid who wanted it.

And as fast as she got two or three of the crowd taken care of, two or three more would come clumping up all breathless with slips of paper on which they had written down the numbers of books they wanted.

I stood around for five or ten minutes, walking back and looking at this or that in other parts of the room and it began to look hopeless. Then, when I turned around once, I saw a break of a couple of seconds coming and hurried up.

"Why, hello, Mr. Patterson," Marie said with a wonderful smile. She put out her soft little hand to me that was a little bit smudged from the rubber stamp. "Awfully nice of you to send me the postcards," she said. "Really it was a thrill to get a postcard clear from Sweden and my little nephew made me pull the stamp off for his collection."

Just then a fat woman came up wanting a couple of books and Marie sent a boy off for them.

"Glad you liked them," I said. "How about eating dinner with me?" I leaned over the desk so the fat woman wouldn't hear me.

Then the boy came back with one of the books and Marie had to stamp it up. When the woman had gone Marie looked up at me sort of troubled. "W-e-l-l," she said, "I really don't go out with strangers. And the library frowns on the girls making dates with patrons. It really does. Sorry."

"For goodness' sakes, Miss Snyder," I said. "We're not strangers. We've known each other for a couple of months and how am I going to tell you about those books? I sort of thought you'd want to know how—"

Then two shabby old folks, a man and a woman, came up for books and I had to wait. When they were going some more people were coming up and Marie said sort of hurriedly, "Well, all right, I'll meet you right outside the library at six o'clock sharp."

Of course I was on hand ahead of time and pretty soon out came Marie, looking trim and ladylike, and I tipped my gray hat politely and Marie said sort of anxiously, "I hope you understand, Mr. Patterson, that I don't make a practice of this sort of thing. I really never met a man outside this way before in my life."

So I told her she made me feel very proud. And then she made me understand that the only reason was that she was sincerely interested in helping me and wanted to know how I had come along with the books.

I took her to one of those cafeteria restaurants San Francisco is full of, where you stand in line and pick up little dishes of radishes and cottage

cheese and pickles and celery and ice tea and get some roast beef and potatoes slapped at you and then stagger off to a table with your tray, if you can find a table.

We finally did locate a table off in a corner far enough away from the orchestra so we could talk without yelling.

Marie nibbled at an olive. "Did you like *Silas Marner* and *David Copperfield?*" she asked me.

I took a bite of radish. "Yes, ma'am," I said. "At least, pretty good. But I think that George Eliot wrote like a woman."

She looked at me kind of funny. "Didn't you know," she said, "that George Eliot was a woman?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "It said so in the front of the book."

"Oh," said Marie. "And how did you like *David Copperfield?*"

"Better," I told her. "Except that David Copperfield himself had a mighty soft head. And I think this Dickens that wrote that book was getting paid by the day and not by the job. Otherwise he wouldn't have used more than half the pages in writing it. There was pretty nearly a thousand pages in that book and it seems like he

could have got just as far in five hundred with leaving out a lot of the stuff that wasn't very interesting and didn't have anything to do with the case."

That sort of surprised Marie. You could see that plain. And here she was, a smart educated girl with a job in a library telling people what to read. And here was a sailor telling her how a very famous author could have made his very famous book better.

"Well—" Marie started to say something. And then she stopped and thought. And then she saw that I was telling the truth about *David Copperfield* after all and didn't go any further.

Then I told her what I thought about the grammar book and her black eyes snapped at me.

"No, Mr. Patterson," Marie said. "You're wrong—you're just altogether wrong there." And then she went on to say that it's absolutely necessary to know every bolt in the keel and though it may seem like there is a lot of bilge down there, a person's education won't be a very seaworthy craft if there's any loose plates in the bottom, or words to that effect.

"If you don't have a strong foundation," she said, "your house won't be safe."

It was fine having Marie tell me these things because I knew she was smart and knew I could believe what she told me. And because I had lots of money in the bank and had made a couple of hundred dollars shooting the dice scientifically on the way home from Norway and Sweden, I decided not to ship again for a while. I decided just to stay in San Francisco and study because Marie had promised to help me.

So I tried my best to study the grammar book and had dinner with Marie two or three more times and then on a Sunday we went on a picnic, just us two. We took the ferryboat over to Sausalito, which is a little town across the bay up north of San Francisco, and then we walked up a little railroad track through the trees a way and then climbed a hill off to one side where the ferns and flowers were growing all around and the skinny little trees ran up thick and straight more than a hundred feet high.

It was nice in there, cool and smelling of the woods, and the sunshine streamed down through the trees in streaks the way it sometimes did through the high-up window in San Juan de Ulloa and it made me think of Limo and that cell and be very happy because it was here instead

of there. And everything was quiet except for a tinkly cowbell a mile or so off and once in a while the dim whistle of a boat or a train so far away that it might have been in another world.

Well, we sat down there and ate our sandwiches and cake Marie had made herself and drank our coffee she had in a thermos bottle, and I looked at her there so little and friendly and smart and kind of cute in her big horn-rim glasses and silk stockings and I thought how splendid everything was. I thought how swell it was for me to be out there picnicking with Marie rather than be getting drunk with some chippy, like you might expect of a sailor, although you may know I was different from most sailors.

There on this picnic I told Marie the best way I could just what I wanted to do. I told her how I believed I could think my way across the Black Ocean where nobody has ever been and how I believed I could find and bring back the secrets God has hidden. It was plain to see that Marie was amazed when I told her this. And I told her how I once had thought you might work out the problem with algebra and about the gentleman passenger on the way back from Holland and how I now believed that algebra or some kind of arith-

metic might help in the voyage like an auxiliary gas engine on a schooner to push her along in the tide rips or during calms.

"Harry," said Marie—you see we were calling each other by our first names by then, "Harry, you really have a wonderful mind. But you need to study and train yourself. You don't know how glad I'll be to help you with your grammar."

Well, as I told you, I had been trying to study the grammar, but for just a second it seemed to me that Marie couldn't see the ocean for the waves. Here I had just told her about the great job I was going to do and she starts to talk about grammar again.

"All right," I said, "I'm going to learn that grammar book from stem to stern. But I still can't figure why cargoing my hold with all this drift about adjectives and nominatives is going to help me a lot. Don't you see, Marie, I want to go after big things."

Marie just smiled.

"Look," I went on, "you take when there's a sunset at sea and the clouds are all banked up in the west purple and black and blue with streaks of yellow as yellow as that yellow daisy flower there, and then the sky all red out to the side and

coppery up above and wigglers of fire scrawling in and out of the big slick swells on the ocean. Take things like that and I can stand and watch it and watch it and the whole thing seems to kind of seep into me and soak me up. And then all of a sudden I know something, and it's something big. But I don't know exactly what it is that I know. Do you see what I mean?"

"I understand," said Marie. "I think, Harry, that you've got something of the poet deep down in you."

"All right," I said; "but this thing I know isn't that ocean is a noun word or that red is an adjective word. It isn't anything like that at all. It's something big and grand. And it's something that's right on the tip of my tongue only that I haven't got the language and the education so I can get at what it is right away, and while I'm scrambling around in my mind trying to figure it out, the whole thing gets away from me. Would knowing grammar or maybe Latin help me in that?"

"It might," said Marie. "Anything that trains your mind might help. But you're really too impatient, Harry. You know that Rome wasn't built in a day. You've got to build up your education

step by step. Lindbergh had to put in a good many years studying and flying before he had learned enough to make his flight to Paris. If he hadn't started at the beginning, and plotted his course and hewed to the line, he wouldn't be the great hero he is today.

"I think," she said, "that you might do something just as great as Lindbergh in your own line. You're the same type, and I know you're smart enough and determined enough."

I couldn't see how you could compare just flying an airplane to Paris with my voyage across the Black Ocean, but I didn't say anything.

Then Marie leaned forward with her eyes glowing in a way that made me glow inside too. And she said, very low, "Harry, I should be proud to help you in any way I can. I might tutor you, you know, and you could make much faster progress even than if you went to night school."

That shows what kind of a girl Marie is. Willing to take up her own time to help me out. I have been all over the world and I have met many, many women. But I've never seen a woman that could compare with Marie for goodness, and smartness too. And when you get to know her, she

seems beautiful also, although you don't notice that at first because she is so very ladylike.

Well, we walked slow on the way back to Sausalito, and while we were waiting for the boat to take us back to San Francisco the big heavy gray clouds began to pile up over the hilltops and by and by they started rolling down to the sea, rolling for all the world like tar or molasses being poured out of a barrel. And by the time we got on the ferry these clouds were tumbling off the shore and riding right out on the slick bay. It was a very odd sight and we rode all the way back through these clouds with the whistle booming out every few seconds because it is quite dangerous in San Francisco Bay during a heavy fog.

We rode in the cabin and you couldn't see a thing out the ports but the solid gray of the fog and for a long time we didn't say much. Every now and then I would look at Marie, and I could see that she was doing a lot of thinking. And after-while she spoke up.

"Harry," she said, "if you want an education so badly, why don't you quit the sea? It's given you all the experience you need with the world. and now it's keeping you from other things. I believe going to sea probably has made you a

finer, stronger, more original man than you'd have been otherwise. But don't you think it's time to quit it now?"

For a little bit I didn't know exactly what to say. A man has to work at something and steamshipping was all I knew except crapshooting. So I told Marie there wasn't anything else I could do but go to sea.

She looked me in the eyes sort of half smiling. "Oh, yes, there is," she said. "A young man with as much personality and intelligence and energy as you have got could make good in most any line. Why don't you get a job here in San Francisco? Why don't you, Harry? Even if you had to start out at very small wages at first that would be all right if you had a chance to learn a good business."

"Gosh, Marie," I said, "I don't know what I could do except be a stevedore and there wouldn't be much percentage in that."

"Oh, there are plenty of things you could do as soon as you'd learned them," she said. "All you need is a chance to learn. And then you'd be here where you'd have me to help you."

I told her how very important having her help me was. And then, I swear I don't know how it

happened, but there weren't many people on the boat and nobody at all aft in the cabin where we were sitting, and somehow before we got back to San Francisco we were sitting there together holding hands like a couple of kids and me happier than I ever remember being before. It seemed then like we had been old friends for a great many years and it was very, very wonderful.

And it came to me then too that Marie was a great deal older than me, in spite of all my experiences. I mean that she was very wise like an old person although she really wasn't quite as old in years as me and not even thirty until her next birthday.

"I've got an idea," Marie said pretty soon, looking up at me very bright. "Mr. John P. Ridley is superintendent of all the Wormser System Stores in San Francisco and he's an old friend of my family. He's almost like an uncle to me because my father and he went to school together and he'd do almost anything I asked him to, I'm sure. Well, Harry, I'm going to ask Mr. Ridley to give you a job in one of his stores."

I didn't know about that.

"It's really doing Mr. Ridley a favor as well as you," Marie insisted. "With your energy and

intelligence you'd be a valuable man for them in no time, I know. And it's really a fine business. Mr. Ridley has made a fortune."

So I finally said all right, not thinking anything would come of it. Lots of people, you know, will say they'll do a thing like that and then forget all about it. But Marie isn't that kind. When she says she'll do something, you can depend on it being done. This talk was on Sunday and the next Wednesday morning I went to work in a Wormser store way out on Fulton Street.

It was very odd at first, me working in a grocery store, wearing a white apron and I couldn't help thinking of poor old Gus Schwartz on the *Paul Golden* and him telling my fortune that a woman would make a grocery clerk out of me.

But I was too busy to do much thinking about anything else than the grocery business. You see, I didn't have an idea what I was supposed to do and they put me to work learning the price of every last can of beans and pound of prunes and bottle of bluing and dozen of oranges in the shop.

On the first day it seemed absolutely impossible for anybody to keep all of that in his head, but my boss, who was quite dark and chunky and named Theodore Bogard, and a slim boy named

Frank Fitzpatrick seemed to know everything and I made up my mind that if they could learn it so could I. But I would have quit that first day, I think, if I had known what was coming. On the second day the main office phoned out changes in prices and I found out they did that every morning, changing the prices on about a third of the things in the store.

Besides all that, you had to learn the names of all the regular customers and those who just came in once in a while and to learn what each one liked and didn't like.

For instance, a woman with a little girl would come into the store and my job was to step up smiling and say, "Good morning, Mrs. Toles. Hello, there, Janet, where's that dog Micky this morning? What'll it be today, Mrs. Toles? Coffee? You prefer the Gold Seal brand, don't you? Yes, we have some fine new potatoes just in from Idaho today. Yes. And this shipment of Santa Clara tomatoes—beautiful, aren't they? All right, a basket of them. How'd you like the cheese you got yesterday? Fine. I thought you would. Nothing more today? All right, Mrs. Toles, on the next delivery. Thank you, Mrs. Toles. Good-bye,

Janet. You want a sucker? You're quite welcome. Come again, Mrs. Toles."

I didn't see Marie then until Sunday night and I had put in about as tough a four days as I'd ever seen. Sometimes you think you're working very hard on shipboard, but you don't have to worry that maybe you're making a mistake. And the deck doesn't seem as hard on your feet as the floor of a grocery store.

I told Marie about all this and she raised her black eyebrows at me.

"Harry," she said, "that kind of training is just what you need most of anything in the world. It'll get you in the habit of orderly thinking and your studies will come easier."

So I dug in and learned all those prices and pretty soon it was possible to keep track of all the changes. I began to learn the names of most of the customers and the things they liked. And because I was bigger and stronger than Mr. Bogard and Frank I could sling around the sacks of sugar and crates of things better and faster than they could. And pretty soon I'm sacking up stuff and scooping out things and working the little adding machine faster than either of them.

One day Mr. Ridley dropped in the store at

the busy time late in the afternoon and watched us. And when a lull came he slapped me on the back.

"Patterson," he said, "I've been watching you and want to compliment you. From now on your pay is raised to one hundred dollars a month."

That made me feel pretty good. While a hundred dollars a month isn't enough to mary a girl like Marie on, it still is more than twice as much as a deckaroo can make. But of course when you're working in a grocery store you've got to pay for your own room and board, which counts up a lot and you get very little opportunity to shoot craps.

That wasn't all that Mr. Ridley, the big boss, said though. The really important thing he said was, "Patterson you just keep on the way you're going and you'll find yourself a store manager one of these fine days."

So Marie and I have decided to get married when I get to be a store manager. You see, I fell in love with Marie the first time I saw her in the library.

A couple of weeks ago on Sunday Marie had to go over to Oakland with her mother to see an aunt who has been quite sick. Because I have been

in the habit of seeing Marie every Sunday night to go over my lessons with her and maybe go to a show I was kind of lost for something to do.

I am boarding out near the store now, so I took a trolley car downtown, thinking maybe I would go to a picture show alone. But when I got downtown I kept right on going to the end of Market Street at the Ferry Building and swung off on foot along the Embarcadero.

It seemed like years since I had been along the water front and it gave me a funny, homesick feeling for a little bit. There were the smells that you don't notice when you are there and don't know you are missing when you are away until you come back. All at once I was mighty glad that I didn't go to a picture show and, while I hadn't been drinking anything for more than a month, I dropped in a saloon for a schooner of good old Frisco steam beer.

The place was full of seamen and pretty noisy with a lot of arguments and all, but I warped into a place by the bar and got my beer and lit a cigarette.

The beer tasted good and I took a deep drag on it and then turned to look over the room. Pretty soon I noticed a red-faced sailor drinking

beer at a table with two other men and this red-faced sailor was looking at me in a funny way. I recognized him and he recognized me at the same time.

"For Christ's sake!" he yelled, slamming his beer mug down on the table and jumping out of his chair.

I blocked just in time to keep from being clipped on the ear and smacked him a good right hand in the chest that sent him back two steps. Then we shook hands and he dragged me over to the table with his two pals and I ordered beer.

You see this was Nova Scotia Red, the old pirate with which I was shipwrecked on the *Chatelaine* and drifted around the lower Caribbean before we were rescued by the *Horace V. Miller* and taken down to Rio.

"Horseshoes, you old bastard," says Red, "you're so duded up I didn't hardly know you. Dice still being good to you? What ship you off? You signed up yet?"

"I'm through steamshipping," I said, taking a drag on my beer.

Red choked on his beer and sputtered. "You'll be through steamshipping," he says, "when they wrap you in canvas and drop you overboard. Even

then I wouldn't bet on it. After the *Chatelaine* I don't think you'll ever die Nor me either."

"Nope, Red," I said. "I got a shore job and I'm all through."

One of the other fellows, a young guy without much of a chin, was a little drunk.

He says to Red, "This ain't that Horseshoes Patterson you was telling me about?"

Red looked a little ashamed. "What's left of him," he says. And then to me, "What in hell is it—a woman?"

"Well," I said, "in a way. But not all. You don't get anywhere steamshipping. I want to amount to something."

Red took the cap off his red head and bowed. "Oh, his lordship's going to amount to something. Can I come call on you when you're president? Will you give me a berth on your yacht, maybe?"

"Sure," I said. "And when you're so old they won't sign you on any ship I'll give you the price of a meal too."

Red looked at me and shook his head. Then he drained his schooner. "Horseshoes," he said, "something's happened to you and I don't like it a damn bit. You got a funny look in your eyes. If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't be here now,

I don't think, and I don't want things to happen to you. Listen here, you ain't made for shore life, steady. I'm third mate on the *Red Queen* and she's the finest piece of iron you ever laid eyes on. Remember the mess on the *Chatelaine?* Well, the *Red Queen* is just as good as the *Chatelaine* was bad.

"Listen, we're heading for Tahiti and Singapore Tuesday morning and there's a berth on my watch for you. What you say?"

Red was getting serious and I thanked him.

"Can't do it, Red," I told him. But there was something about it all that made my blood run faster. "I've got a girl the like of what I never saw before. She's a lady, Red. She don't know about all the rottenness we know about, but she knows everything that's good—the things we don't know about."

Red grinned very sarcastic.

"Red," I said, "this girl's giving me an education. She's teaching me things you've got to know to amount to something. There's some things about it all you wouldn't understand—"

"I understand 'em all right," said Red. "And I'd be the best friend you ever had should I shanghai you. What you working at?"

I told him I was working in a grocery store, but that I was going to be a manager pretty soon.

Red stretched his big mouth back almost to his ears, but he wasn't grinning. "A grocery clerk," he whispered. Then he yelled, "Boy—four beers!"

We drank several more beers during which Red told the other two—the boy named Joe Peters and the bigger fellow named Herman Mueller—about our time on the *Chatelaine* and in the boat.

Then we went out and Red made me go with them down to the pier to see the *Red Queen,* which was, as he said, a fine little ship, the kind you like to sign on.

"You think it over," says Red. "You think it over tonight and if you change your mind you come down and see me." I told him I would and then we went to another saloon for one more beer and found a crap game in the back room where I won forty-six dollars which would have taken me nearly two weeks to earn on my job.

So I was still feeling my beer when I went to bed and lay there thinking that I'd never again be watching the stars from a flying bridge and thinking about the mysterious Black Ocean while

I held a ship on her course, hearing the soft pound of the engines way down in her and the swish-swish of the sea alongside.

Then, from way off in the night I heard the deep, mournful whistle of a steamer clearing the Golden Gate and I felt almost like crying for something lost forever. There was just an instant when I thought, "I'll go with Red. I'll sign up with him tomorrow." In that instant it seemed that I just couldn't go back to the grocery store and the prunes and sugar and politeness to customers.

But I got over that by thinking of Marie. And I thought that unless I get education I might never come any closer to sailing across the Black Ocean and finding the reason for everything than poor old Gus Schwartz.

Gus wasn't prepared with an education, so he got nowhere. But I am studying three evenings a week and I know I am building a real solid keel for my Black Ocean ship. Marie won't even let me talk about the Black Ocean to her now. She wants me to keep my mind on my studies and the grocery store. "You're not prepared for such work," she says, "and wouldn't it be silly for a

man to try to swim across a river before he'd learned the swimming strokes?"

Marie is very wonderful that way. She says I have done very well indeed with my grammar in the last few weeks.